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Let the Car Burn, We're Going to the Faire: History, Performance, Community and Identity within the Renaissance Festival

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Let the Car Burn, We're Going to the Faire: History, Performance, Community and Identity within the Renaissance Festival

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Dedication

For all the Rennies and the die hard audiences of Renaissance festivals everywhere.

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Abstract: The Renaissance festival is an interactive venue which utilizes popular and fantastic views of history to encourage audience members to participate in the performance. While these festivals share much in common with living history presentations, the open use of myth and romanticized history at the Renaissance festival, while sometimes criticized, allows the festivals to incorporate people in the performance in ways that other venues cannot. Living histories, usually heritage sites, seek to confirm and validate identity or membership within a specific community. Their methods of presentation leave little room for playing with or questioning these historically predetermined roles. The Renaissance festival, based as it is in a much earlier history and a romanticized one at that, creates more flexible group and individual identification. Because the Renaissance festival encourages the exploration of identity and community beyond those determined by the history of the historical performance, it carries

the potential to change the ways in which individuals view themselves, performance, history, and community. It does so through encouraging new constructions of identity for the individual as well as new group affiliations based on interpersonal interactions, commerce, and myth. These will be viewed through the use of three case studies of the Scarborough Faire, Texas Renaissance Festival, and Michigan Renaissance Festival. Participation in these performances can encourage a questioning of how community and identity can be built and what they mean.

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The Renaissance Festival: An Introduction

"I like this place and would willingly waste my time in it."

As You Like It, II iv

What is This Place?

On almost any weekend, whether it rains or shines, people climb into their cars, modern time machines, and journey to the Renaissance. On one September weekend, a friend and fellow cast member of the Michigan Renaissance Festival saw distant smoke while driving to the site that morning. As he neared the source of the smoke, he saw two men in home-made chain mail shirts walking away from a burning car. Thinking that there could only be one obvious destination for the two individuals, he offered them a ride. As they got into his car, he asked the two if they wanted to stop and phone someone about the accident. Without a backward glance, one replied, "Nah, let the car burn. We're going to the faire."

Even without car trouble, a long drive often awaits the visitor to more than 145 Renaissance festivals across the United States. One, the Scarborough Faire near Waxahachie, Texas, gives no indication of its existence apart from a small brown sign marking an exit off of Interstate 35 for Farm Market Road 66. The land remains flat and treeless, broken only by the occasional trailer home. As the car bounces along a poorly maintained road, there is no indication that a performance of any sort happens out here. Two or three miles further, flags and pennants marking the parking lot appeared to the left, but nothing emerged to mark anything the size of a Renaissance festival. The front gates and portico demarcating the large performance area only become visible upon entering the parking lot, practically on top of the "village." Once a ticket has been purchased, for $14.98, people enter the gates where a young woman dressed as a

serving wench hands out programs. At this point in the journey, I checked the map of the site inside the program, making an effort to remember where I had parked. There was no parking lot listed. According to the map, my car was on the village commons.

Several miles to the southeast of the Scarborough Faire at the Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF), the visitor is greeted in the street in front of the main gates. The costumed actors wonder at and make public comments on the strange clothing, cameras, and sunglasses of the audience-visitors, addressing them “lord” or “lady.” Some audience members seem to feel conspicuous, blushing at the comments of the actors and the attention of other audience members. Visitors can rent costumes at a small shop just outside the main gates, and some do so, entering into the play initiated by the actors outside the entrance. The massive gates, guarded by people costumed as Beefeaters, are set into a huge wall. Joining the line to enter, the visitor emerges into a huge representation of a Renaissance village during the reign of Henry VIII. A program purchased at a cart just inside the gate contains a map of over 250 acres (SCRIBE). A grid showing the time and place of performances lets the visitor know what the stages and street areas offer as entertainment. Asterisks next to some of the performance times denote performances in which the royal court participates. A paragraph at the beginning of the program informs the audience that:

> The year is 1518. Amazing sights and rambunctious rivalry rule the day! King Henry VIII, Queen Katherine of Aragon and their brilliant court have gathered at the great harvest festival at New Market to award a coveted new title: Admiral of the Oceans and Warden of New Found Lands. The honors are to go to the first intrepid explorer to present solid evidence that he has claimed a fine portion of the mysterious New World for England. And Their

> Majesties have spent the year since their challenge was issued planning to honor the winner and showcase his exotic New World treasures royally. (TRF Program 2000)

The description continues for another page and gives a hint of the scenarios involving the village characters presented during the course of the day. A smaller schedule of performances involving only the royal court and furthering the "story" of this particular Renaissance festival is displayed at the bottom corner of that same page.

Similar explanations are presented at other Renaissance festivals, contextualizing the historical timeline for the audience. The Michigan Renaissance Festival (MRF) explains that the year is 1564, and the monarchs Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots are present to celebrate the signing of a peace treaty between England and Scotland. Though this event never happened, at the Renaissance festival the accuracy of the history usually remains loose. This encourages the actors to create their own dramatic situations without feeling constrained to follow a precise sequence of historical events. In doing so, it further encourages opportunities to play with the audience allowing the actors to pull spectators into historical situations. Play under these circumstances sounds both innocuous and ambiguous, but in reference to the Renaissance festival, play means the ability of or opportunity for audience members or actors to insert themselves into the performance in an active way without strictly predetermined roles or narratives. In particular, play at a Renaissance festival focuses on identity and community by asking the performer or audience member to explore and experiment with both of these notions. The interpretations of history emphasize the romantic, but never wholly leave behind the events of the period. History, rather, is amended, and the results of those additions allow further potential for play and marketable themes for different weekends. For instance, continuing

with the Michigan Renaissance Festival as an example, the program contains an insert corresponding to the smaller, weekend themes, such as Romance Weekend. Special events include Romeo and Juliet auditions for anyone who volunteers and is chosen from the audience, a Renaissance Smoker (cigars, snack buffet, and ale in a "bawdy pub atmosphere"), a Queen's High Tea, and a Dating Game. The program lists other themes and the events associated with them in the hope of encouraging visitors to return. Some of these include: the Royal Ale Festival, Children's Realm, Highland Fling, Italian Masquerade, and Wonders of the World. Within this general performative spine, the audience has the freedom to watch other shows or have spontaneous interactions with inhabitants of the village.

Before diving into any theoretical or critical discussion, it is helpful to know and understand the nature and qualities of a subject. The purpose behind this introduction is to literally introduce the idea of the Renaissance festival. Not everyone is entirely conversant in the performance that takes place at a Renaissance festival making it difficult to move beyond the surface details and into an analysis of what the performance may be doing at deeper levels. In order to understand how this type of performance builds both community and identity, it is important to explore how it fits into performance as a genre and how it developed from its beginnings. The introduction will also examine the current festival model, its operation, and production structure. In addition, subsequent sections will specifically deal with the actors, audience, and the type of setting in which they find themselves. I will also include descriptions of the types of performances, how the scripting is managed for these, and the way in which the Renaissance festival utilizes history as distinct from a heritage site. The introduction will conclude with an examination of the questions that will be explored in the body of the work.

The Renaissance Festival as a Genre of Performance

Renaissance festivals come to constitute a performance genre by compiling various related performance conventions and arranging them in a distinct manner that creates a particular type of theatrical entertainment. Such components include how it uses history and interactive acting to build an immersive environment for the audience. In addition, actors and audience alike are encouraged to experiment with the history, and this experimentation is expanded to include role playing. The interaction also incorporates these identities into a new community, bounded by the performance, shared by both the actor and the audience. Looking at the Renaissance festival a genre created by these conditions and techniques allows it to be positioned within the continuum of performance and understand how prior genres of performance have contributed to its evolution, and how it may, in turn, contribute to current and future genres of performance.

In general, a Renaissance festival is an interactive environmental performance where audience members, ideally, are immersed in a performance environment and encouraged to play a character of their own, or at least to participate in some conscious fashion. As such, the Renaissance festival has inherited from several traditions of performance and from other areas as well. The most obvious influence comes from the avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[1] The largest contribution involves how the audience is viewed. “[B]y the seventies the site of presence has shifted from art’s object to art’s audience, from the textual or plastic to the experiential” (Sayre 5). Rather than the artist or the artwork being paramount, the audience comes to the fore as the focal point of the artistic experience. Their presence is required in order for the art to have “occurred,” which emphasizes the experiential with such work. The

Renaissance festival benefits greatly from the avant-garde's turn to the audience as the site of artistic experience and from the interactive theatre techniques which emerged from the happenings and performance pieces of the time. Renaissance festivals focus, first and foremost, upon the visitor. Much of the training for actors focuses on how the actor is meant to encounter audience members and bring them into a deeper experience of the environment and the performative moment.

Having benefited from the avant-garde, the festival has come to create its own genre from this basic starting point. Its next addition is history, specifically the techniques of living history, incorporated into a distinct historical environment for the purpose of making profit. Instead of precisely recreating an historical event based on primary research, the festival takes its form from antecedent works on or about that history resulting in a collage—another inheritance from the avant-garde. Making a collage opens the performance further by offering more potentialities for the audience to play. The festival has appropriated history to make an intentional collage of the past for consumption by the public.

The Renaissance festival is ultimately most known for the interactive and immersive nature of the performance which relies upon various interactive techniques, such as improvisation and audience responses. Interactive acting techniques, ranging from the development of character *lazzi* to guest endowments, or an invitation for audience members to join a scene, are crucial to the performance and to an understanding of what the performance attempts to build with the spectators who visit during the course of the day. The open exchange within this performance technique aids in constructing the communities and identities within the performance both operations tie it closely to the interactive theatre genre. Interactive theatre, including first person historical interpretation as well as Augusto Boal's Theatre of the

Oppressed, tends to stress an immediate and direct relationship between the actors involved in the performance and the audience. For a long period of time, directors and actors involved in the creation of Renaissance festivals were forced to improvise their own training and approaches to interaction with the audience. Any interaction between festivals, even now, tends to be informal; often Renaissance festivals are unaware of visitors representing other festivals. Because Renaissance festivals exercise autonomy, and because unions and conferences do not exist, the publication of training methods allow for a dissemination of information that has remained largely unavailable. After years of trial and error, only recently have Renaissance festival directors begun to publish on the practice of creating Renaissance festivals. These publications largely focus on training the actors who participate in the performance, but they also contain ways of defining what is meant by interactive performance.

Two Renaissance festival directors have come forward to address the nature of the interactive performance environment and how to train actors for them. Jeff Wirth and Gary Izzo both examine the creation of a character, focusing on different aspects of the process. In addition, they delve into the nature of the interactive environment as a means of performance. Wirth's Interactive Acting is a more general text that focuses on defining the different types of interactive environments, building characters, and playing with other actors and the audience. Garry Izzo, in The Art of Play, concentrates more on the elements for building the environment and how a character inhabits it. While both have fascinating thoughts on actor training and improvisation, their examination of interactive performance style allows for a better understanding of the nature of a Renaissance festival.

For Wirth there are three major styles of interactive theatre: environmental, socio-political, and theatrical freestyle (5). Of the three, a

combination of environmental and theatrical freestyle acting best describes the performance at a typical Renaissance festival. Environmental interactive theatre stresses the necessity and use of the environment within the performance. In addition, the actors formally give the audience characters and a situation to play out within this environment (6-11). This is not quite the case with a Renaissance festival. The reliance *is* upon the environment, but characters are not assigned to audience members upon entering other than referring to them as visitors/villagers. Rather, Renaissance festivals encourage audience members to make up their own characters. This more closely follows Wirth's definition of theatrical freestyle. This particular kind of interactive theatre allows the audience members to join in the performance at random. In combining these two styles, one can garner an understanding of the way in which the performance at a Renaissance festival unfolds.

But what of socio-political interactive theatre? This form of performance, best represented by Augusto Boal and his work, tends to be avoided by Renaissance festivals. While Boal's idea of the "spect-actor," audience members who help in the co-creation of the performance, is prevalent at the Renaissance festival, their purpose in doing so is not necessarily to further a socio-political purpose. The lack of further exploration into socio-political performance may stem from difficulties in training actors or perhaps from a lack of knowledge on the part of the entertainment director.[2] Gary Izzo, however, hopes eventually to experiment with ways in which this can be employed within a Renaissance festival setting. Overall, and in keeping with Boal's ideals, for Izzo, the goal of interactive theatre is for the guest/audience to feel "vital and empowered" (17). To that end, the primary need of any interactive theatre, including the Renaissance festival, is to mark out the space for 'play.'

> All play takes place within a "playground," a space marked off beforehand, either physically or mentally, deliberately or as a matter of course. The ancient Greeks' word for such a space is *temenos,* the sacred circle. It is a sacred spot cut off and hedged in from the "ordinary" world, a consecrated and hallowed ground within which special rules obtain. (Izzo 9)

The idea of creating a *temenos* becomes extremely important for the Renaissance festival because this construction provides a place of both safety and permission in exploring community and identity. The remoteness of the festival, the massive gates at its entrance and the large "village" beyond it serve to embrace the audience member in something "other." Once this has occurred and the audience has entered the "stage," Izzo points out that interactive forms of play differ from participatory theatre in that "interactive play is no longer aware of itself as play" (Izzo 25). The fact that the audience is immersed in the performance environment sets them in a unique place: they are a part of the characters' own reality. The audience no longer exists as an audience. They are instead transformed into a piece of the performative reality.

The History of the Renaissance Festival

Renaissance festivals have become a big business, tapping into a booming consumer market. Nearly 10 million Americans chose to visit a Renaissance festival during the 2000 season (Simons 33). The Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF) and Minnesota Renaissance Festival each draw over 300,000 spectators for a performance season (SCRIBE), while the Michigan Renaissance Festival (MRF), Kansas City Renaissance Festival, and Maryland Renaissance Festival draw over 200,000 people. Even with such a large audience base, many people, including a number of theatre practitioners who work in more conventional theatre situations,

have no grounding in or understanding of Renaissance festivals. These complex performance environments utilize and fabricate history, in this instance the English Renaissance, in order to provide a framework for the theatrical performance itself. Not all Renaissance festivals use the same methods for staging or content; they employ different characters, different segments of the Renaissance, and different environmental layouts. They do, however, still contain a number of commonalities. The largest similarity is their reliance upon environmental interactive theatre and the improvisational techniques for this immersive staging. Further, most Renaissance festivals have modeled themselves after two prototypical Renaissance festivals.

The idea of the Renaissance festival first began when Phyllis Patterson was hired in the early 1960s as a Director of Drama at the Laurel Canyon Youth Center in the Hollywood Hills (Simons 34). Patterson was interested in education, and as a result, chose to stage a history of drama as a performance project for the children. This in turn sparked an interest in the idea of the itinerant player of the Middle Ages. In thinking about what the medieval players might have encountered as they moved from town to town, she began to form a performance concept. “She envisioned an interactive environment where everyone, from the theatre players to the vendors and visitors, were engaged in a lively exchange . . .” (Simons 35). While this formed the core of the idea for a Renaissance festival, Patterson had not yet actively begun to see the possibilities of such a performance nor implement the idea of building an actual community out of the performance. Her initial ideas did not actively compel the audience to create identities of their own, but merely encouraged them to imagine what it might have been like to live in the period.

This changed, however, when Patterson thought of producing the medieval portion of the show as a fundraiser for the local public radio

station. In pitching the idea to the administrators, she originally posited a medieval faire (Simons 35). This was rejected. “According to Patterson, one director even said, ‘I don’t want anything to do with the Middle Ages; there were no civil rights back then.’” (Simons 35). This statement provides a clear reflection of how the ideals of the 1960s influenced the creation of the Renaissance festival and comments upon community and identity. The conception of the Middle Ages did not, for the managers, adhere to their understanding and expectation of the past. They equated the Middle Ages, with a time opposed to such issues as equal human rights. Representing such a time which might be viewed as negative by others would, in turn, reflect negatively on them. Rather than give up the idea of a festival with an historical theme, Patterson shifted the motif by approximately 300 years to the Renaissance. This allowed her to retain some of the material for a medieval performance, while incorporating the perception of a “brighter” period of history (Simons 35).

While the radio directors’ understanding of history may have been inaccurate, their perception of the past, and that of society in terms of its values and associations, became far more important. Because mythic and romantic understandings of the past can obscure the actual events, people frequently ignore a more complex understanding of history. Even though historians note that Elizabethans lived in an uncertain and confusing world of famine, plague, and political instability, the Renaissance is often only perceived and portrayed as an age of extraordinary developments in humanism, exploration, and the arts. These advances easily come to the fore to obscure any other more complicated or ugly aspects of a particular past, allowing the community to identify itself, rightly or not, with an enlightened period of history.

The first Renaissance festival took place the weekend of May 10, 1963, with three thousand people gathering at the remote five-acre site.

Patterson requested that particular site, because “we wanted to have as few distractions as possible which would take people out of an immersion in the time period” (Simons 35). In the end, the location proved to be too small to accommodate the number of people attending. Ultimately, the festival was moved to the Paramount Ranch. “At the new location, the faire was held in 1965 for 3 days, with an attendance of 7,000 per day. By 1966, the faire had expanded to two weekends, with nearly 12,000 visitors per day. And by the mid 1970s, the faire had gradually grown from one weekend to six” (Simons 36). This small festival gave birth to the California Pleasure Faire, of which there are now two, Northern and Southern. The southern site, while impermanent and having no fixed structures or layout from year-to-year, became the earliest model for the current Renaissance festival sites around the United States.

The Current Renaissance Festival Model

The man responsible for the version of the Renaissance festival with which most people are familiar worked in a glassblower’s shop at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire of Southern California (Simons 37). George Coulam decided that he, too, wanted to create a festival of his own. He started his first Renaissance festival in his home town of Salt Lake City, Utah. Coulam only had a two-year lease on the land and when it ran out, he learned that the Mormon elders had disapproved of the venture, considering a Renaissance festival too bawdy for their tastes. Unable to find anyone who would lease a large enough parcel of land to him, Coulam went to Minnesota to establish a festival. Having read The Story of Walt Disney: Master of Magical Worlds by Bernice Selden, Coulam saw that the Renaissance festival could expand beyond the small setting Patterson envisioned. The structure and models used by Disney in creating his theme parks became the map for Coulam’s Renaissance festival. With

this new method for building the environment, Coulam created the Minnesota Renaissance Festival in the early 1970s (Simons 37). Utilizing a combination of English and Italian history, the Minnesota faire was one of the first festivals to use the notion of a unified scenario for the site. This, Coulam felt, would assist in introducing the audience to the performance gradually, something that he culled from Disney's ideas and felt necessary for larger success. The idea caught on. "Most of the major faires in America were direct copies of Coulam's Minnesota model" (Simons 38). Through his influence, this pattern of following a series of scenarios acting as a narrative sparked the current convention. Coulam, however, did not stop with the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. He went on to found one of the largest Renaissance festivals in the United States—the Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF).

Many Renaissance festivals still follow the Minnesota model, but there are other festival directors who want to stretch current convention to include more diverse histories. The majority of festivals in the United States base their performance on the English Renaissance or combine this history with that of Renaissance Italy. Seldom does the audience see other aspects of world history during the same time period. This, however, may begin to change. "Bobby Rodriguez, who runs the Florida Renaissance Festivals North and South, says that when he first looked into starting a medieval-themed festival in the early 1990s, . . . he saw an opportunity to create a new kind of festival, one that would more accurately represent the diversity and variety of Renaissance cultures" (Simons 39). While Renaissance festivals began, for Patterson, as a way to educate the public, the desire to draw crowds through the philosophy of Walt Disney has moved some Renaissance festivals to the extreme end of the entertainment scale. As Patterson commented of her own work, "'experiencing the lifestyles of other times changes the range of one's insights, expectations,

and accomplishments. Shift perspectives and you shift a person's entire psychology'" (Simons 34). Rodriguez and others like him may spark the next trend in Renaissance festival models.

Operation of the Renaissance Festival

Within any one Renaissance festival, a number of specific elements concerning the construction and running of such a production can be described. In general, SCRIBE, a web-based faire information clearing-house, currently lists 145 faires in operation within the continental United States. Each Renaissance festival autonomously determines its performance run in terms of both the length and the time of year. The dates of operation for the individual festivals are not determined or influenced by any other festival's operation. Often some performance runs overlap, as is the case with the Kansas City Renaissance Festival in Kansas City, Missouri, running from late August through mid-October, and the Michigan Renaissance Festival (MRF), which runs from late August through the end of September. Some smaller festivals may operate for only two weekends, while the larger festivals may remain in operation for two months. Most Renaissance festivals operate during the autumn months due to cooler weather, which makes the wearing of ornate costumes outdoors more comfortable. Some festivals, however, also choose to open in the late spring for similar reasons. With the exception of January and February, somewhere in the United States, at any point between March and December, there is a festival in operation.

The variations in performance runs are due to the fact that most festivals are independently and privately owned, although permutations of this exist, and individual corporations can encompass a number of Renaissance festivals. For example, one of the festivals that will be examined in this work, the Michigan Renaissance Festival, is part of a

larger collection of fairs owned by Mid-America Festivals which include: the Kansas City Renaissance Festival, Medieval Faire (Florida), the Bay Area Renaissance Festival of Largo (Florida), and the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. For the most part, Renaissance festivals are for-profit organizations, and they focus upon choices and material that can attract sizeable audiences to generate revenue. Often large collections of festivals owned by a single corporation, such as those mentioned above, will use the larger profits of one festival, such as the MRF, to continue to add to or improve upon another festival. In order to build these festivals, the owners rent or, if they can, buy a piece of land. Coulam originally rented the land for the Minnesota Renaissance Festival for a dollar a year (Simons 37). Once the land is secured, the festival itself can be built, and as a performance entity, share some elements in common with the operation of any theatre or theatrical production.

The Production Structure

Renaissance festivals require a relatively large and diverse staff in order to function smoothly and efficiently.[3] At the top of the production hierarchy are the producers, who back the endeavor financially and often own the property. They hire a festival manager, which combines some of the functions of the stage manager, technical director, and production manager, to oversee the Renaissance festival as a whole. Various areas, including public relations, advertising, special events, food, crafts, and site maintenance, have their own directors or managers, but in many ways the entertainment area serves as the core of the production. With the aid of an assistant director, the entertainment director oversees the creation of the scenarios and themes for the year. This is done with the help of a production staff that includes members of every segment of the festival production. She also schedules the rehearsals and workshops, and for each

weekend, coordinates the schedules for the stage and street acts. At large festivals, other directors serve under the entertainment director, overseeing select elements of the entertainment such as the royal court, street characters, and music. Each of these areas can involve the talents of up to thirty or forty actors. The directors of more specific segments of the entertainment can take care of actors' immediate problems and needs for the main director. Generally, directors actually do very little in the area of what theatre practitioners would view as traditional directing. Blocking is done for royal court functions and occasionally for choreographed fights, but specific directors carry this out with the approval of the entertainment director. Many of the duties simply entail organizational and scheduling concerns, and contract negotiations with the actors.

No one officially fills the position of artistic director. Frequently, the owner has a vision of how the festival site should look, but often this role is handed to the manager or the site building personnel. In this respect, the unity of production for the village is fulfilled, but the Renaissance festival lacks a particular mission statement. Coulam's model stressed entertainment for a large audience with the goal of turning a profit on the performance. Some current directors, such as Gary Izzo and Bobby Rodriguez, do attempt to focus on the exploration of social themes and other countries' roles in the Renaissance. This, however, is not yet a strong trend, though the director is best placed to begin to make these changes, since she is responsible for casting scenario needs and hiring all entertainers.

Another underused member of the entertainment staff is the dramaturge. A few Renaissance festivals do employ a dramaturge or have one or more individuals serving in that capacity. Both the TRF and the Scarborough Faire utilize one in the creation of each performance. This person is called upon to help create scenarios and write extensive material

for the program, helping to place in context what is seen in the performance. Audience members receive the program from costumed employees stationed at or inside the front gates of the festival. The program contains essential information for the audience, including performance schedules, types of shops and foods, and a map of the site. More importantly, the program outlines the history being performed within the Renaissance festival. Because of this practice, fictional history comes to appear alongside historical fact, such as the example from the TRF program, excerpted earlier, which combined Henry VIII with the fictional town of New Market. The scenarios and themes portrayed at the Renaissance festival are usually found in the first few pages of the program, giving the audience the fictional history driving the performance. Other material includes Shakespearian phrases and words for the audience to use, explanations of subjects like falconry and famous painters, and thumbnail histories and timelines of the monarchies being portrayed. In addition to aiding in the creation of the program, the dramaturge is called upon to help with actor workshops, building and costume design, and material for characters. Unfortunately, a number of Renaissance festivals do not employ a dramaturge, leaving such duties to fall upon the director and assistant director, or more often than not, no one at all.

Actors at the Renaissance Festival

The actors are meant to portray everyday life in the village and become the audience's contact with the culture and history of the Renaissance. When and where these improvisations occur is left to the actor. Interaction between the actors happens more regularly than direct interactions between actors and spectators. One reason for this propensity lies in the training prior to the festival. Some actors hired by the festivals have had professional performance training, while many others have not.

Even though some of the people have had MFA training or professional experience in live performance, the environment of the festival, with its reliance on improvisation and interaction, requires further training for proficiency. In some ways, this places many of the other actors, with no professional training or experience on relatively equal footing with those who have. The disparity in terms of both actors' training and the lack of familiarity with this particular type of performance requires special workshops.

Most, though not all, Renaissance festivals will offer workshops to all employees, but they are required for the acting company. The common workshops include: characterization, improvisation, and costuming. History and accents, or language, are sometimes given their own workshops but often are incorporated with the others. Veteran actors within the resident company often conduct the workshops. Characterization provides the actor with the means to construct their own persona for the duration of the festival; it does not matter if they have been cast to portray a specific historical personage. Whether playing a beggar or Queen Elizabeth, the actor is responsible for building a person with whom spectators can interact. This is especially important since there is no script in a conventional sense for the actors to follow and obtain information concerning their characters.

Improvisation provides the techniques and "rules" for involving both one's fellow actors and the audience in the action. A large part of the workshop is spent in making actors comfortable with creating scenes and scenarios from nothing. More advanced workshops focus on how to make the audience involved and comfortable with such interaction. Through the course of the festival, unseasoned actors are usually taught by the veteran performers, who show the novices not only how to approach spectators, but also which particular spectators to approach. Most of the information

imparted to the newer actors involves the reading of body language and its relation to a person's willingness to be involved in the action.

Costuming workshops provide information and assistance in designing and making your own costume. While festivals usually do have a costumer who makes and maintains the costumes for the king and queen and occasionally other major characters on the royal court, other street performers and national acts are responsible for clothing themselves. The costumer, however, is on hand to approve costumes designed by the actor to ensure that they are socially acceptable and feasible for the conditions encountered at that festival. I once had this duty for a single festival season at the Michigan Renaissance Festival and had to turn down a design by an actor who wanted to wear nothing but sheepskin and fleece garments. While his design was appropriate for his character, the festival runs during August and September, which are usually hot months in Michigan. His costume would have been extremely uncomfortable for him to perform in for an entire day—not to mention the authentic smell they would have produced due to not being able to wash them in any way. Actors who do not know how to sew ask other performers or friends who can sew to help them. Often performers opt to purchase their own costume pieces from various shops within the festival. They usually receive a discount from the shopkeepers as a professional courtesy—the actor is a walking advertisement for their wares.

While having to provide your own costume may seem like a large financial outlay for the actor, all Renaissance festivals have different policies and pay scales for actors' compensation. Some festivals pay nothing to the actors while others, such as the Maryland Renaissance Festival, fairly compensate everyone performing. Usually there is a combination of paid performers and volunteers. National acts have a specific pay contract which also gives them hat rights, or the right to

busque for tips after a show. Other members of the company may earn a specific amount per day based on experience. During my final year of the Michigan Renaissance Festival, I earned fifty dollars per day in addition to a packet of complimentary food tickets for use at the festival. Because it is considered not only a breach of privacy but also bad form to inquire about other actors' contracts, I do not have personal knowledge of the precise amounts paid to other actors. It stands to reason, however, that given my standing in the company I represented a median wage. National acts, main characters, and more veteran performers would have been paid more than I, while less experienced actors would have been paid less or not at all. In the past, student actors, typically from local high schools and colleges, at the MRF would compete for a "Rookie of the Year" Award which granted them a $1,000 scholarship to the college of their choice even though on a daily basis these actors were considered volunteers,

While this may sound like it takes advantage of the average actor, people truly love working at the festivals and most do not particularly care if they receive compensation for their time. As Sally Harrison-Pepper noted in her examination of street performers in Drawing a Circle in the Square, people choose to perform in unconventional ways for different reasons. Festival performers are not unlike street performers in their techniques or reliance on the audience for their performance. "For these performers, the audience is the prime motivation. Indeed, the possibilities for mastering, manipulating, and/or cultivating its responses is a seductive feature of outdoor entertainment" (16). I readily admit that this observation certainly holds true for the draw Renaissance festivals had and still have for me. Several colleagues over the years, including Clark Orwick, Doug Kondziolka, Chris Arterburn, David Ballard and others, have expressed a similar response when asked what draws them to this type of performance.

The Setting of the Renaissance Festival

Audience members entering into the performance, even those who have never attended a Renaissance festival before, come to expect or understand that they will encounter the eccentric characters created by the actors in an equally eccentric environment. The Renaissance festival has developed a reputation for this; and, typically, audience members are at least tacitly aware of this propensity through advertisements and word of mouth. For the characters and the performance to operate successfully, the festival needs a setting in which the actors, as characters, live. This usually takes the form of a village. The Renaissance festival may take the name of a real place, such as the Scarborough Faire[4] does, or the name may be fictional, such as the Texas Renaissance Festival's (TRF) New Market, or the Michigan Renaissance Festival's (MRF) Hollygrove. These performance environments are rarely, if ever, seen from the roadway. The Scarborough Faire in Waxahachie provides a typical example of such a setting. Visitors find themselves drawn further away from the highway, separating them from the current century, and into the village of Scarborough to finally leave their car on the "village green." Ideally, once the spectator enters the front gates, the modern world should slide away, replaced with a facsimile of the Renaissance. Patterson's original intent for the setting included isolating the audience as much as possible so that they could experience the history as a culture. This not only provides a level of privacy, but also the sense of entering a time thoroughly separated from the twenty-first century.

Most festivals, in addition to choosing a remote location, also separate the performance space from the "real" world in some fashion. Some utilize the landscape itself through the use of trees and brush to provide an outline for the village. The Hawkwood Festival near Fort

Worth, Texas relies almost entirely on the trees and thick brush in the area to outline the performance environment. Others—and this is more usual with larger and more established festivals—build a large wall to encompass the action of the performance. The separation is necessary in order to provide, as much as possible, an undisrupted frame of reality for the audience.[5] But ultimately, the two realities must impinge upon each other, and the result actually grants some success to aspects of the performance.

Many of the buildings within this performance frame, typically shops, utilize Tudor style half-timber construction. Some, however, choose to follow a more fantastic theme, often resembling pieces of a fairytale. The shops vary in size and sometimes, though not always, have a second story for storage of goods or sleeping/camping areas for the vendors. Renaissance festivals use shops as the predominant built structures within the environment. Few buildings represent homes or other types of constructions of a Renaissance village, even though the spaces above the shops serve as camping space for some of the merchants during the run of the performance. Food booths/pubs, feast halls, and stages comprise the remainder of the structures. The areas around the buildings and the buildings themselves continue to provide juxtaposition, this time in terms of goods and commerce. Signposts at the Michigan Renaissance Festival point the way to the Mystic Cup in the event that a spectator needs a cappuccino. It also helpfully guides visitors to Ye Olde ATM should they need extra cash. In addition, nearly all the shops accept either Lady Visa or Master Card, as signs in the back of the booths indicate.

The festival encourages shopkeepers to sell handcrafted goods having something to do with the Renaissance. Festivals always have shops featuring clothing, pottery, swords, and other material readily associated with the Renaissance on a romantic or mythic level. A good deal of

leeway, however, is sometimes given to this criterion. Other shops may sell items with less historical significance. At the Michigan Renaissance Festival, spectators can obtain rustic pottery containers labeled ‘Farts’ and candles shaped like large sad-eyed dragon babies. Most of the booths at festivals adhere to selling Renaissance wares, often clothing or jewelry. Sometimes these shops maintain historical detail in their wares and are present at many different festivals. This would include shops such as Bald Mountain Moccasins (hand-made soft leather shoes) and Pendragon Costumes. Usually, shops ring the inside of the wall, encompassing the entire performance area, with small islands of shops interspersed throughout the grounds. These buildings sometimes sell commodities that have something in common with the performances in the areas. For example, the swordsmith at the MRF is located near the tournament field. Most of the items sold can aide in creating characters and getting into the spirit of the history presented. Jewelry, clothing, hats or garlands, and accessories (i.e. shoes, belts, mugs, or swords) tend to be stylized for a modern interpretation of the Renaissance.

Intermingled with the many shops are formal stages. Their numbers range from one or two at smaller Renaissance festivals, such as the Reno Renaissance Faire in Nevada, to three or more at the larger faires, including the Washington Renaissance Fantasy Faire in Gig Harbor, Washington, which has eight stages. The brightly colored, wooden stages follow an architectural plan that theatre historians would recognize as what has come to represent the Elizabethan stage. Two curtained doors open off the upstage area at stage right and stage left, and some larger stages have a discovery space with a musicians’ gallery above. TRF also has a stage based on Palladio’s Teatro Olympico, an early Renaissance stage modeled after the Roman amphitheatre in Orange, France. While most of the stages are arranged on a thrust, audiences only

find seating in the front, rather than on the sides. Further, the larger stages provide awnings over the audience for shade and, to an extent, rain.

The Audience

Throughout the course of a Renaissance festival, people come and go during the day and may wander at will through the grounds. In some ways it is like an amusement park without the roller coasters and fun houses. Ideally, audience members have seen advertisements for the Renaissance festival in their local media. If the audience members have heard of the festival through word of mouth, they often do not come for a specific weekend. Should this be the case, the visitor can examine the program insert in order to gain information on the performances.

But who comes to these performances? As I noted earlier thousands of people attend festivals all over the United States. Each person has different reasons for attending and experiences they wish to derive from the performance. Understanding all of them would be extremely difficult at best. Many festivals, however, conduct exit polls among the audience members in order to further their own market research.[6] While these change, such information gives an idea of the people who attend a Renaissance festival.

In terms of general statistics, most people who attended the Michigan Renaissance Festival in 1996 were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four. The next two highest age groups were the eighteen to twenty-four year olds and those between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four. Of these people forty-two percent were male and fifty-eight percent were female, and sixty percent of all individuals were single. A majority of these people had some college education or had college degrees, and the two highest income brackets were those making between $20,000 to $40,000 and those making less than $20,000 per year. The exit poll also

asked if they were aware of any weekend themes (sixty-seven percent said yes), and if they had had interactions with any of the village characters (seventy-four percent answered in the affirmative). Such information shows that a number of reasonably well-educated white and blue collar workers attend the Renaissance festival, and that many of these are single men and women who are largely in their late twenties. The pace and content of stage performances will likely reflect this as will the reliance upon notions of adventure and romance in attracting spectators to the festivals. In addition three-quarters of them participated in the performance in some fashion beyond simply being passive audience members.

As a result of education and exposure to the many films depicting the Renaissance and Middle Ages, many of these people have some specific ideas concerning what represents the Renaissance and how it is portrayed by the Renaissance festival. Much of this material comes from local media advertising the festival, including newspapers and television commercials, and films which promote specific images of the Renaissance, emphasizing notions of romance and adventure, confirming historical images with public expectation. The audience may anticipate specific performance events, such as the joust or a feast. Such performances are prominently featured in the festivals' advertising efforts in order to display an ability to meet audience expectations of the performance. As a result, these particular events conjure up the Renaissance for many audience members, creating a reciprocal relationship between expectations and offerings. Many of these expectations are satisfied by the smaller performances that make up of the larger performance of the Renaissance festival.

Types of Performances

Stage Performances and National Acts

The Renaissance festival contains several types of performances within the environment. In addition to the scheduled stage performances, there are street performances and one-on-one interactions with street characters. Stage acts, formally scheduled for the large stages, tend to be referred to as national acts, or "nationals." These professional performers, terming themselves neo-vaudevillians, tour the United States during the festival seasons. Nationals can be a single person, such as the Ded Bob Sho [sic], or can represent a franchise. Puke and Snot, favorites with Renaissance festivals for years, were unable to keep up with their own popularity, so they franchised themselves, training actors to portray Puke and Snot at other shows. Some performers achieve such popularity and experience at Renaissance festivals that they branch out to the traditional stage. The Flaming Idiots, a staple of the Austin, Texas theatre scene, got their start touring Renaissance festivals, and Camryn Manheim of the ABC television series The Practice developed her love of acting as a festival performer in California (Hughes 4).

Jousting

Of the national acts, the most specialized and popular are the knights who perform the tournaments. Commonly held on an area within the Renaissance festival typically called the Tournament Field, more spectators see this particular performance than any other stage act at the Renaissance festival. It has also come to represent the Renaissance for a majority of people and as such carries a great deal of weight in asserting the history being presented at the venue.

The material in the tournament itself varies little in form, following a standard progression of traditionally ascribed to tournaments in the Middle Ages.[7] The content and its context for the audience are different

from festival to festival and depend upon the group performing. Renaissance festivals usually place the tournament field near the center of the site and the entrance of the royal court signals the beginning of the joust. They make their way to the royal stand that each Renaissance festival provides for them. The Master of the List follows the royal court in on horseback and provides explanations of the rules of conduct and combat for the day. After introducing the knights and allowing them to parade their banners, the games of skill begin. The knights compete at throwing spears at a target and catching rings on lance tips—all from horseback. The winners of these games are allowed to progress to the full contact combat.

Once the games of skill are completed and the winners determined, the chosen knights charge one another with huge wooden lances; each participates in three passes. The object of the combat is to either shatter the lance, proving a hit, or to unseat one's opponent. The Scarborough Faire keeps the performance fairly formal and awards the knights gifts of land and monies at the end of the performance. The Michigan Renaissance Festival, however, incorporates elements of popular culture. For instance, when a lance finally splinters as it knocks one of the knights to the ground; the victor throws the broken lance to a squire and rides to a position next to the fallen man. As the defeated knight begins to recover from the fall, the victorious knight, in a move reminiscent of professional wrestling, stands in the saddle and jumps to the ground ramming his elbow into the chest of the man on the ground. At the end of the joust, the knights remove their helms and pass them through the audience, busquing for tips.

Some Renaissance festivals, particularly the larger ones, augment the performance of the joust with other combats and races. These tend to represent other time periods besides the Renaissance. Drawing from popular notions of Roman paratheatrical entertainment, the Texas

Renaissance Festival offers chariot races prior to the joust. Four competitors, sometimes more, race around the ‘O’ shaped tournament field. The winner of the races chooses a woman from the crowd to ride in a victory lap. The Michigan Renaissance Festival stages a gladiatorial combat after the end of the joust. While the TRF does not attempt to explain the purpose or history of the chariot race, the MRF takes pains to create a context for the combats within the history created by the performance. The Master of the Lists re-enters, this time dressed in more leather than velvet, and announces the names of the gladiators as they enter. All the names are Scottish rather than Roman as the combat might suggest; and the knights from the joust play the parts, having discarded their armor for strategically placed leather. As they enter, the Master of the Lists explains that gladiatorial training was brought about in England because the standing army could not stand up against the widespread cattle raiding occurring in the small shire of Hollygrove. In order to rectify this deficiency, Her Majesty, Elizabeth I, dictated that this aspect would be added to the training of the regular army so that the spirit and abilities of the warriors of old would be brought back.

Having explained gladiators in Elizabethan England, the performance begins. The gladiators heft broadswords and step up to some structures that resemble cricket wickets with a pile of wood shims placed on top. These, according to the announcer, are meant to simulate a sword going through a man’s arm. The gladiators hack these in pieces. A higher stack of wooden shims is placed on the wicket—to represent a man’s leg. Finally, an even higher stack represents a human torso. The next demonstration of skill involves a large axe and several watermelons set on platforms of varying height. The gladiator is timed as he runs past each watermelon, placed to simulate a man’s head while standing, kneeling, and on horseback, using the axe to hack it in two. Having completed this

event, the gladiators are timed at another skill sequence. They must jump over a flaming bar, vault through a flaming hoop, and attempt to throw three hand-axes at a target. Once the gladiators have done this, there is a final race where they must tow a wheelbarrow containing a wench, leap over a wooden wall, and carry the woman off the field. This particular performance serves as an excellent example of how other popular culture media inform the performances at Renaissance festivals, sometimes distorting historical probability, since it was not implemented until the season following the release of the popular film Gladiator.

All additional time periods aside, the joust and knights at a Renaissance festival have very little to do with the reality beyond the format for the combat. While we currently live in what many consider to be a violent world, historically things were worse in the Renaissance. Both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance it gave birth to were extremely violent times. The most representative pastime of the period, and certainly the most pervasive symbol, the tournament, was not the chivalrous piece of romance imagined today and seen at the Renaissance festival. “They were vicious sham battles by large bands of armed knights, ostensibly gatherings for enjoyment and exercise but really occasions for abduction and mayhem. As late as the year 1240, in a tourney near Düsseldorf, sixty knights were hacked to death” (Manchester 6). The Church decried its practice and throughout the period issued edicts against those who held them or competed in them, while in England increasingly tight regulations and fees for participants kept jousting to a minimum.

By the time the Renaissance was beginning, the knight was becoming obsolete in comparison to new techniques and technology on the battlefields of Europe. Though the Renaissance festival relies heavily upon the representation of the knight, they come by it honestly. Many historians of the Middle Ages failed to even mention tournaments or only

glossed them briefly, which would leave romances as one of the only, then, sources on jousting. Because of this, the Renaissance understanding of medieval jousting and chivalry came from other sources. As Louis B. Wright noted, in Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, the people of the Elizabethan England were buying up romantic tales of chivalry from the French and Spanish published by Caxton (375). This taste for tales of heroism and medieval chivalry furthered a romantic image of the times which found later expression among the Victorians and, at present, the Renaissance festival.

Street Performances

Performances at the Renaissance festival, however, do not solely rely on formal stages and the tournament field. In addition to these two venues, performances can also be scheduled in the streets. These semi-formal performances occur in pathways or a designated street area. Scheduled just as the main stages are, street performance times can be found in the programs available at the front gate. These groups can be national acts, such as Nature of Mercy, a staged duel and street fight, guest artists, or locals, such as a university commedia troupe. Audiences gather to stand around the performers, and the level of interaction between actor and audience tends to be more intimate. Often performances rely more heavily upon audience participation, requiring one or more volunteers from the gathering of spectators.

Street Characters

Finally, at the most basic level of performance, there are the street characters. While technically all the performers within the Renaissance festival have street personas, street characters comprise most of the cast of a Renaissance fair, and these actors form the largest group of entertainers.

They depict the villagers and the royal court. At the Scarborough Faire, audience members can come across a beggar reclining against the wall of Eagle's Crossing Bridge. According to the program, his name is Scab, the village beggar.[8] He dresses in somewhat dusty rags and has aesthetically smeared a line or two of dirt along one cheek. The beggar does not speak to the spectators; instead, he rattles a small tin bucket while clutching a small iron frying pan. A sly smile begs for a dollar or at least a quarter. Upon receiving one, he abruptly hits himself in the head with the pan, grinning all the while.

In addition to such interactions with spectators, the actors also work one on one with one another, shopkeepers, and audience members to provide less eccentric and more everyday encounters. These interactions within the performance can be between actors only, where the audience members simply observe, or the actors can draw the audience into participation in the scene. Audience members at the Michigan Renaissance Festival can encounter Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I while walking the streets. She engaged me, her court, and other passers-by in an impromptu poetry competition, challenging her court to take spectators' suggestions for poetic themes. My suggestion of making a poem that could use 'orange' caused her to wag a finger at me as being too challenging. Through the actors' efforts the Renaissance festival takes on the feeling of a village where people live, work, and know one another. Their endeavors expand the performance in terms of potential and possible participation on the part of the spectators, opening up pre-conceived notions of the past and historically determined material through research into other pasts, and then physically demonstrating these contributions through a character.

Other Performances

In addition to the overall performance of the Renaissance festival, individual fairs offer other types of entertainment for the spectators which do not take place on either a stage or in the streets. A number of people participate in wedding receptions or corporate parties, which most Renaissance festivals handle through private bookings. Usually, these events take place at the feast hall. At the MRF, the groups make their way to the center of the village, where a large stylized Tudor castle, called The Castle, stands. Although it looks as if it has upper rooms, in reality it is one large dining area with an open space in the center. Small doors and windows allow the passers-by to look inside.

But the bounty enjoyed by the middle class patrons of the Renaissance festival was not necessarily enjoyed by their Renaissance counterparts. Even the upper and middle classes would have struggled somewhat during Elizabeth's reign.

> Typically, three years of harvests could be expected for one year of famine. They years of hunger were terrible. The peasants might be forced to sell all they owned, including their pitifully inadequate clothing, and be reduced to nudity in all seasons. In the hardest time they devoured bark, roots, grass; even white clay. Cannibalism was not unknown. Strangers and travelers were waylaid and killed to be eaten, and there are tales of gallows being torn down—as many as twenty bodies would hang from a single scaffold—by men frantic to eat the warm flesh raw. (Manchester 54)

This did not mean that during the times of plenty people did not celebrate fully. On the whole, however, life was harsh. Such conditions might not have been too very far from the truth during Elizabeth's tenure on the throne. For a number of years during her reign, the people of England suffered through failed crops and subsequent famine. The problem

presented by crop failure can be seen in the number of national poor laws passed during the Tutor reign and invoked during times of emergency.

Inside the Michigan Renaissance Festival's feast hall, however, average people are treated to a feast, music, and entertainment. Each full menu has a name: King's Table, Queen's Celebration, Queen's Picnic, Italian Buffet, and King's Banquet. They each have a price level that varies from $23 per person for the King's Table to $14 per person for the Queen's Picnic. The food includes garden salads, grilled lemon-pepper chicken, and roasted pork loin. Each years the meals are planned and prepared by a chef (hired seasonally) in a series of kitchens on the site. The meals are then carried to the feast hall for serving. Everything here guarantees an "authentic Renaissance experience and style." Much of the material, however, is invented, and, as Jim Peterson, owner of the Michigan Renaissance Festival has commented, "Every year we need (to offer) three new things that are 400 years old" (Karoub C2).

"Scripting" Performances at the Renaissance Festival

Within the performances mentioned above, the Renaissance festival utilizes different "texts": scripts, scenarios, and improvisation. The stage shows and the royal court's scheduled events are usually scripted with audience participation built into the performance. Most Renaissance festivals do not employ a playwright. Rarely, if ever, do Renaissance festivals share material with one another. Instead, the scenarios are usually derived from a combination of sources. The owner, festival manager, directors, or actors can submit ideas for scenarios and finished scripts. The director and owner usually reserve the right to approve material for performance. In the case of the royal court, the script helps to present the background for the history and theme for the weekend so that the audience can orient themselves into the reality being created at the festival. This has

the effect of providing a certain level of linear story, since the non-linear and non-plot dependency of the Renaissance festival can confuse audiences and actors alike. Thus, to add cohesiveness to the performance experience, the royal court at various Renaissance festivals serves as the anchor point for themes and conflicts within the festival as a whole. An audience member who wants to experience a more linear performance can attend all the scheduled royal court activities through the course of the day and come away with a sense of having seen a complete story.

Other conflicts or relationships between villagers are incidental and decided upon by those actors involved. Encounters between two street characters or between a street character and a spectator can be treated as a scenario. This term refers to the operation of *commedia del arte* performance and its reliance upon improvisation and stock characters. Ideally, the actors at a Renaissance festival know their characters and the themes for their particular festival. With this information, actors can improvise performances within the framework created by their characters background and stereotype (i.e. wench, village idiot, rich merchant), and how their characters might act within a given situation. The actors can build random and often unscheduled performances involving one another and the audience. More often than not, the scenarios are made up by the actors to communicate the sub-themes for a weekend, or the material serves to build the identities of the street characters, solidifying them as individuals within the village. These improvisations allow the audience to experience what Patterson idealized—an immersion within a historical period.

What does the Renaissance festival have to do with History?

I have mentioned that the Renaissance festival draws heavily upon history; its very name evokes it. The way in which it utilizes and views

history, however, does not necessarily reflect an actual history. Before examining this and related ideas, I need to be clear about what I mean when I use the word Renaissance in referring to this particular type of performance. Most historians, at present, agree that the Renaissance is a vague and imprecise term for this very complex period of human history. It becomes slightly more problematic to apply the term Renaissance to English history. In fact, E.M.W. Tillyard, in The English Renaissance: Fact or Fiction?, openly questions and explores whether the Renaissance ever occurred in Great Britain. Today this epoch is more commonly referred to as Early Modern Europe in order to better describe the results of the events and circumstances emerging from this period. In essence, scholars have come to see that, like historian William Manchester, there was no one particular event that can be referred to as the Renaissance. Rather there were many Renaissances, in literature, art, economics, education, and politics, over an extended period of time. All of these, and other areas, had their own distinct circumstances that can be termed Renaissances beginning in 1453, which marks the fall of Constantinople. This event heralded the new influx of Greek and Latin texts into Europe, although "[f]ixing a date for the beginning of the Renaissance is impossible, but most scholars believe its stirrings had begun by the early 1400s" (Manchester 25). The end of the period is just as difficult to fix; usually scholars look to the early to mid-1600s during the religious and political aftermath of the Reformation. Ultimately, the Renaissance is not necessarily the bright, shining, and stable period depicted by the Renaissance festival. Rather, it came about through ". . . the shattering of the medieval world . . . That historic collapse was the legacy of countless events and influences, which combined to create the greatest European upheaval since the barbarians' conquest of Rome" (Manchester 228).

This is not what the spectator encounters during the performances at the Renaissance festival. In the narrative of what an audience member might actually find at a Renaissance festival, performance becomes the lens through which we see the actual history vexingly challenged by heritage and tourism. Performance becomes a mode for heritage and tourism to put pressure on history. Heritage uses history to create and foster senses of individual and group identity through mythologizing and lauding the past, both the fact and the fiction. At the Renaissance festival, heritage challenges history. Performance, because of its visibility and sense of the immediate, readily grabs onto aspects of heritage and tourism for their inherent dramatic content, bending and warping history into what is needed to express group and individual identity. The difference between the heritage and history, however, lies not in the content, but in the form and purpose that the content takes.

> History and heritage transmit different things to different audiences. History tells all who will listen what has happened and how things came to be as they are. Heritage passes on exclusive myths of origin and continuance, endowing a select group with prestige and common purpose. (Lowenthal, Heritage 128)

Heritage emerges from history as a means to reinforce individual or group identity, often inventing or resurrecting historical material. One such instance of this practice occurred during the reign of Queen Victoria. Her administration, in order to bolster the flagging support of the monarchy during that era, took the history of England and created a mythical tradition and heritage.[9] The new, in this case invented, traditional heritage granted a unified identity for the country's citizens based on a national history. The resulting pomp and ceremony said far more about the, then-current needs of the British ruling classes than it did about the history from which it was derived.

In a similar vein, within the performance particular to the Renaissance festival, the historical events and personas are mythologized, manipulated, and played with by actor and audience member alike. Through this action, the Renaissance festival encourages the audience to experiment with notions of both identity and community. By turning the Renaissance festival into a display that shares commonalities with heritage, the performance markets itself in a mode similar to tourism. Rather than the heritage promoter's cliché, "Get in touch with your past, and find your roots," the Renaissance festival asks its audience to take a further step. Instead of being constrained by the reality of one's roots, the Renaissance festival grants permission and encourages individuals to imagine their roots—to be something they only wished they could be. Permission to break away from the constraints of reality in constructing the past comes from the understanding that performative circumstances are special and suspend the rules concerning how reality is supposed to be. In such a way, two important considerations emerge: First, historical determination ceases to be the overriding or limiting factor. Individuals at the Renaissance festival are free to tap into any identity they wish, and not necessarily one that history might determine for them. Second, in choosing to take on a new identity, either partially or wholly, audience members can insert themselves into the community created by the performance environment. This insertion can occur through one or both of two different means: through interpersonal interaction with performers and other audience members, and through commercial transactions. The display and sale of wares at the Renaissance festival primarily devote space and money to items that can assist in the creation of alternative identities. Commerce becomes a means not only to identity within the performance, but also to enter the community created by it.

Performance at Historical and Heritage Sites

Because this performance is at least partially grounded in heritage, the Renaissance festival has some commonalities with several other venues for heritage and history in the U.S., most notably Plimouth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg. All three employ aspects of a presentation technique known as living history, which utilizes performance in order to convey the history/heritage for the audience. The performance in these cases occurs in an immersive environment meant to envelop the audience, creating a sense of "being there" without giving up the amenities of the twenty-first century. In this way, the experience operates as tourism. People come to visit a specific destination in order to experience a culture, society, or environment different from their own that offers an immersive space where actors portray local inhabitants.

But the history at heritage destinations such as Plimouth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg is different from that of the Renaissance festival. Both the traditional heritage site and the Renaissance festival share missions focusing on educational and commercial concerns, however, they each emphasize one of these to a greater or lesser degree. Because the focus at the more traditional heritage venues tends to be on education, and thus on a more authentic portrayal, insertion into the community becomes difficult for some. Specific types of identities are already defined and limited. The Renaissance festival, with a more commercial emphasis that focuses on entertainment, offers the potential to break away from historically specific identities in addition to providing an environment where one may safely do so.

The difference between other heritage venues and the Renaissance festival lies in the ability of the performance to encourage a sense of community and identity play. Even as a group of tourists, the audience represents a community. In turn, the group of actors portraying the

inhabitants creates a community as well, as both an acting company and as the villagers they represent. For the spectators, the act of participating in the performance reinforces the sense of being a part of a community, which allows them to construct an identity if they so choose. Typically, such community and identity are produced and reinforced by the heritage of the group.

The history and heritage at the Renaissance festival, however, does not wholly reflect that of the United States. The material depicts a much older and more mythologized version of the past. While the United States places itself within the tradition of Western history and culture, the association with the Renaissance is a peripheral one. Early American history points to the great pains that the U.S. took to separate itself from what it considered "Old World" European traditions. The population may have continued with the heritage, but the national stance was one of independence, of forging a distinctly American heritage (Lowenthal, Heritage 189). The identification with the Renaissance focused on the romantic aspects of the history rather than any nationalistic or cultural inheritance from Europe. The mythologizing of the Renaissance offers a compelling alternative to traditional heritage.

In all of the environments mentioned above, the audience is a group of tourists, and the history presented generates a heritage that displays the origin of a specific community and the identities it engenders. Each of these venues, however, also uses performance, and not just heritage, to promote access to community to varying degrees. They all employ performance differently, allowing or impeding access to identity and community. For places like Plimouth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg, the performance is strictly an educational presentation; their community does not invite the audience to play—only to watch and question. They view the audience as a group of time travelers separate

from the heritage community, who require instruction in the ways of the past. The relationship is tutorial, never including the audience as direct members of the community, only as those who have inherited it. The Renaissance festival, conversely, while being somewhat tutorial, does not treat the audience as a group of time travelers. The actors are specifically trained to pull the audience in to become members of the community being created; the environment encourages play. Play within this framework may only be possible at a performance presenting another country's history in addition to a past that is much older than that of the United States.

With this in mind, both performance and history can conclusively be said to aid in the building and reinforcement of both community and the identity of persons within that community. When these two principles combine into immersive performances utilizing heritage built from history, there is the potential to explore and play with the notion of community in addition to the identity held within that community, especially when such destinations become the focus of tourism. Of the performances currently undertaking such an operation, the Renaissance festival offers the full potential of playing with history in order to encourage the tourists' incorporation into a community as well as exploring potential identity. This is possible for a variety of reasons, including consumerism and mass tourism as applied to history and performance.

Questions Explored in this Research

Interactive theatre has provided an opportunity to present heritage to people in a vibrant, immediate way. In performing aspects of heritage, and by association, history, community, and identity can be viewed organic and living, something that continues to evolve and change even as

it retains commonalities with the past. Renaissance festivals take such aspects a little further. Heritage and history provide a point of imaginative departure for the understanding and creation of community and identity. People are asked to recreate, subvert, or confirm these notions for themselves in an environment that does not necessarily ask them to rely on preconceived ideas of who or what they should be. This work explores how performance at Renaissance festivals can encourage community and identity-play through the creative use of history and heritage.

In examining community, I refer to the ideas of Anthony P. Cohen as expressed in The Symbolic Construction of Community. In the editor's forward by Peter Hamilton, he says that Cohen "sets out to deal with community as it is symbolically constructed, as a system of values, norms, and moral codes which provides a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members" (9). This notion works well in examining the audience as a community of people for the duration of a performance. Performance itself is reliant upon and constructed by symbols which must be read in order to create a separate space for the performative reality. In this instance, symbols used by the Renaissance festival to evoke the past are abbreviations of what people relate to and have come to expect of this particular history. The readings of these symbols may or may not have an explicit interpretation, and other possible interpretations will be dependent upon the individual experience.

Community embodies two uses within its meaning. The first is to imply similarity within a group and the second is to imply differences between groups (Cohen 12). This does not sound dissimilar to the purposes of heritage and history. Heritage and history in the construction of a culture will be the initial providers of the symbols that groups can read for indications of similarity and difference. "The word [community] thus expresses a *relational* idea: the opposition of one community to

others or to other social entities. . . . It seems appropriate, therefore, to focus our examination of the nature of community on the element which embodies this sense of discrimination, namely, the *boundary*" (Cohen 12). The boundary separating one group from another is the one that tells an individual whether or not that someone is a member of their group. These boundaries are set up through the reading of various cultural and social symbols. Whether the readings of the various symbols are similar or not will dictate group membership or even levels of group membership. "We are talking here about what the boundary means to people, or, more precisely, about the meanings they give to it. This is the *symbolic* aspect of community . . ." (Cohen 12). If the meanings, or the perception of meanings, shift, then so too will the nature of the community and who belongs. In this way, one can look at the audience as a particular community—one of many—within the performance of a Renaissance festival.

By using select qualitative techniques suggested by Michael Patton (1990), and utilized in my prior work on the Renaissance festival, this study will examine how the Renaissance festival builds community in ways that are different from the standard traditional theatre performance and different from the living history venue that it resembles. Traditional theatre builds community; but in traditional settings, this sense of community is largely passive and predicated on a certain level of separation from the performers. Living history venues also attempt to build community through heritage which ends up excluding some individuals from the experience. In addition, these sites distance the audience through lecture structures and treating people as time travelers. The Renaissance festival uses history and performance to set up new community boundaries through implementing and inserting symbols for the group to read. The atmosphere allows people to share readings of

history on a broader level in addition to allowing them to leave behind their normal symbol boundaries for a safe period of time.

In researching prior studies on the Renaissance festival, in particular my master's thesis in 1997, A Qualitative Description of the Michigan Renaissance Festival, I have faced some methodological quandaries. Patton's work, among others, has been instrumental in assisting with my examination of festivals. This study requires a blending of two theoretical traditions: ethnography and heuristic inquiry. The ethnographic approach aids in answering what a Renaissance festival is, who works there, and the people who attend them. In this way, I can observe the essentials at the center of a festival, separating it from living histories and other venues even as I locate it within a tradition of performance. A large and problematic hurdle in this research has been the gaps in the information kept and available on the specifics of a particular festival. Much of this is only obtained through word of mouth or interviews. As I have noted in my prior work, heuristic inquiry both helps and hinders in this regard.

> This approach usually describes the experience of the phenomena by comparing and contrasting the experiences of several researchers. Grounded in the researcher's personal experience, the intensity of the relationship with the phenomena yields an understanding. Most of this information comes from tacit knowledge of the subject. It is usually the case that several researchers serve to support the meaning, essence, and quality within the experience. In this particular investigation, this is not possible since there is currently only one person studying the phenomena. (Moore 8)

Unfortunately, this situation has not changed very much. More articles on specific festivals have been written and a fan magazine, Renaissance, has

emerged, but scholarly attention remains slender. Even though this remains a difficulty, the use of supplemental research materials will assist in supporting my experiences and observations of the festivals in this study. Resources from the festivals include: programs, brochures, new articles (when available) educational materials, and e-mails from members of the staffs. I also conducted interviews with select individuals both in person and via e-mail. While this amount of data may seem minimal, "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (Patton 185).

After having worked at a Renaissance festival for twelve years, much of my knowledge of the festivals is tacit.[10] My relationship with Renaissance festivals is a long one—one which provides unique insight into their construction and functions as a performance. In the twelve years of employment I have done a variety of jobs. Beginning as a food booth supervisor and hawker at the Michigan Renaissance Festival (MRF), I later served for four years as an apprentice within their academy program learning to become a street musician and entertainer; I went on to play in a professional music group featured at one of the pubs. After playing for several years, I moved on to become a member of the production staff and apprentice master for the Academy. My last year was spent on the royal court as Duchess Isabella Borgia. In addition to these major job titles, I served once as resident costumer, and conducted workshops in improvisation and history.

There is a need, however, to examine Renaissance festivals in a broader context, which means more information from other festivals. The structures are similar between fairs, with small variations, and my knowledge is such that I may make general observations while still

understanding the differences. To that end, I visited two other faires in addition to the Michigan Renaissance Festival. While the data available is small and a majority of the information comes from the personal experience and observation, the use of combined methodology along with known research material should produce and understandable description of the types and nature of the symbolic community created by these festivals and the way in which it encourages identity play.

Chapter One will outline the theoretical frameworks I have used in my examination of the performative reality created by the Renaissance festival. In elaborating upon the current state of scholarship for the Renaissance festival and venues like it, core concepts from several disciplines, including cultural studies, sociology, historiography, ethnography, and anthropology, and their application to an examination of the Renaissance festival will be explored. This will include an explication of the terms of history, performance, heritage, tourism, community, and identity as they are used in this study. Incorporating Richard Schechner's work on restored behavior, David Lowenthal's views of history and heritage, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's examination of the heritage and tourist destinations, John Urry and Dean MacCannell's explorations of the tourist, and current concepts of identity will be viewed in conjunction with a continued examination of Cohen's ideas on symbolic community. This will assist in elaborating upon the interrelatedness of the terms under inquiry here in order to lay the groundwork for the exploration of the case studies in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two will utilize the Scarborough Faire in Waxahachie, Texas as a case study for the utilization of commerce and play. As a small Renaissance festival, it presents an ideal examination of community and identity from the perspective of both the performer and the audience member. They rely on a more rigorous depiction of history and a great

deal of personal interaction between the actors and the audience to build a sense of community within the performance. History in this interpersonal environment encourages the audience to read history as a tourist destination through diffusing the potential dangers of the historical symbols being used. They do so in order to affect how community is built and how the interactivity builds identity. In addition, this chapter will pave the way for an examination of consumerism involved in the building of identity and community at the Renaissance festival.

The Texas Renaissance Festival, near Houston, Texas, will provide the case elements for Chapter Three. As the largest festival in the United States, it provides a different perspective of community and identity primarily based on consumerism as opposed to the interaction between actor and audience member. The Texas Renaissance Festival's size and audience volume make interaction possible but less intimate, relying instead upon consumerism to engender both community and participation. There is an emphasis on the physical environment and the commercial transactions to provide the sense of history and community. Commerce affects the type of historical symbols and their perception using these to build a sense of community for the spectators.

The final case study, the Michigan Renaissance Festival, provides the focus for Chapter Four, offering a look at the far end of the spectrum for Renaissance festivals and their relationship with performance, history, community, and identity. The Michigan Renaissance Festival creates a purely sequence of spectacles for the tourist, and the owner endorses commercialism and sponsorship to the extent that historical traditions are given corporate sponsors. In addition they intentionally make connections between symbols of the history and present day commercial sponsors—reading and associating the symbols for the audience both opening and closing the play of community and identity. There is a balance between

interaction and commerce, but the reliance is not quite so much upon a specific history, although there are attempts to move it in that direction. Unlike the Scarborough Faire, however, they still rely more upon a mythic view of the Renaissance often mixing several histories and pasts into the performance, which results in an inclusive and encouraging environment for community and identity play.

Endnotes

[1] I must, however, qualify such a statement. While I do believe that the Renaissance festival has inherited something of avant-garde performance, I do not believe that they were ever directly involved in any organized movement *per se*. If they ever were, I must believe that it was unconsciously. I have seen no direct information to support that Phyllis Patterson, the originator of the Renaissance festival, was consciously relying on the techniques and ideas concerning performance that were emerging or already had emerged from the avant-garde movement at that time. In addition, Renaissance festivals have always been set up as for-profit performances without particular political or ideological mission statements, whereas the avant-garde has in many ways eschewed or mocked consumerism and profit in addition to being highly articulate in its political and ideological stances. Having said this, I do not mean to intimate that the Renaissance festival has not benefited from or shares commonalities with the avant-garde. They have in several ways because of their reliance on interactive theatre which does trace itself to some avant-garde theatre practices.

[2] While many of the actors typically employed at a Renaissance festival are either very young or have had no formal training, this trend is, in fact, changing rapidly. A larger number of people comprising the acting company have had either undergraduate or graduate training in theatre or acting specifically. A higher number of entertainment directors today have masters' degrees in some area of theatre prior to being appointed as directors. Many are now bringing this knowledge to bear in the creation of the performance environment.

[3] For a comprehensive look at a single Renaissance festival and its production and operating structures see: Jennifer Moore, A Descriptive

Study of the Michigan Renaissance Festival (Masters Thesis, Michigan State University, 1997).

[4] Coy Seviere, Entertainment Director for the Scarborough Faire, explained in an interview that the Renaissance festival needed to apply for permission to use the name Scarborough. The English town of that name had copyrighted itself.

[5] Richard Schechner makes a note of these frames as they relate to Plimouth Plantation and the California Pleasure Faires. He points out that a reality (that of the village) contains the audience, even as the audience remains contained within current reality.

[6] Because such a document sometimes contains proprietary business information, they are difficult to obtain. I have copies of the 1996 exit polls for the Michigan Renaissance Festival because at that time I was still on the production staff and obtained permission for their use. I presume that the statistics will fluctuate and change over time, but my research is not solely dependent on these demographics.

[7] For an explicit history of the tournament in Europe and its performance see Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry, and Pageants in the Middle Ages (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989).

[8] Bill McCurry plays Scab and also happens to be the Resident Performance Company Director.

[9] For more details concerning this process, consult David Cannadine's "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," in The Invention of Tradition ed. Eric Hobsbawm, 101-164.

[10] A great deal of this knowledge comes from ideas put forth by Robert J. Sternberg and David R. Caruso and defined as direct, mediated, and tacit

learning. For details on these ideas see David R. Caruso and Robert J. Sternburg, "Practical Modes of Knowing," Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing, Part 2, Elliot Eisner, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 142-150.

Chapter One

Stamping Passports and Passing Immigration: Theorizing the Renaissance Festival as a Foreign Country

Introduction

Historian David Lowenthal called the past a foreign country, and the Renaissance festival makes this manifest, offering individuals a trip to a completely different country where travelers can skip the jet lag and not worry about drinking the water. Audience members can even emigrate and become a part of the community of actors who populate a quasi-mythical Renaissance England and villages like Scarborough, New Market, and Hollygrove. I became a native of this past in 1985; and even though I have not performed at a Renaissance festival for many years, I still hold citizenship, as do other people in a wide variety of communities across the United States. Professional actors, computer programmers, teachers, amateur historians, firefighters, engineers, men, women, African- and Asian-Americans—some become members of the festival community while others choose to remain audience members, just tourists passing through. But all of these people, regardless of classification, have the opportunity to play with who they are, how others see them, and the kinds of communities they choose to occupy.

The introduction posited that combining performance and history to build immersive performances utilizing heritage has the potential to explore and play with both the notion of community and the identity. Making such destinations the focus of tourism, and, as a result, consumption, further complicates the process. The Renaissance festival provides an example of the potential for playing with history and all that the audience may gain in doing so. The complexity and richness of

performative possibility inherent in this environment calls a number of performative and historical areas into question. Renaissance festivals perform history, but the performance does not limit itself to a re-enactment of set historical events. Rather, it attempts to bring to life a thin slice of the Renaissance, meeting audience expectations of this particular historical period—one that has been heavily romanticized and mythologized.

Because of the complexity of the performance and its content, studying the Renaissance festival requires linking definitions of performance, history, and heritage together and exploring how this affects community and identity and their definitions. Understanding how Renaissance festivals build notions of community and identity hinges upon a theoretical framework that can incorporate relevant ideas from aspects of community and identity, in addition to how history is challenged and confronted with heritage and tourism. The Renaissance festivals' use of performance allows all of these notions to work in tandem with one another in an observable way. What begins to emerge is an understanding of how the Renaissance festival offers a safe place for people to explore how they view themselves and others. The groundwork here will create a foundation for the understanding of the case studies that will follow.

How Performance and History Have Led to Interactive Genres

The current understanding and practice of immersive performances of histories and living histories only began to emerge in the twentieth century, particularly as destinations for tourists. The creation of the modern museum in the late eighteenth-century played a role in the slow development of this phenomenon. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines some of the early uses of performance in the museums in Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage. Providing slices of

culture for the bourgeoisie, especially for those who could not make the popular "Grand Tours" of the time, museums provided glimpses of the exotic colonized peoples coming under European authority during the period. In conjunction with this development, the introduction of panoramas in the 1820s and their increasing popularity through the nineteenth-century helped to fuel the growing desire to see exhibits framing cultural artifacts in a "realistic" setting that could encompass the viewer. Thus, these early developments began set the stage for the interactive museums and historical performances found today. Museums, feeding the public desire for “close visual observation on the spot,” greatly influenced the exhibition of material in galleries and museums alike (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 43). Travel and personal experience of both the events and places being displayed became the paradigm for the display of historical and natural objects.

Like the desire to see objects within their “original” context, people also developed a desire to see their favorite authors and historical figures in environment conducive to close examination and direct experience. Such a situation requires a certain level of interactive performance techniques, and there are many precedents for this within the United States. For example, the circuit Chautauquas popular during the latter half of the nineteenth century provided ample evidence of the use of interactive techniques in conjunction with the beginnings of first-person historical interpretation. Chautauquas were events which took place within local communities, much like a circus, and brought the members of these communities together for the experience of a wide range of performances under the label of Chautauqua. While many of performances were professional readings of literary material by a narrator, as the form progressed the venue included the impersonation of authors and famous figures. Actors would attempt to evoke the person portrayed through dress,

speech, and mannerisms resulting in a one-person show. Bringing to life contemporary and historical figures allowed audience to feel that they had an effective experience of that particular person.

In the meantime, with the stress upon the recreation of historic events, museums and theatres in the nineteenth century began to compliment one another in terms of their purposes. Museums began to utilize theatrical techniques in lectures, while theatres featured live animals and the latest technologies. “Museums served as surrogate theatre during periods when theaters came under attack for religious reasons, while theaters brought a note of seriousness to their offerings by presenting edifying entertainment” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 34). The social purposes of these two institutions became partially conflated. Museums began to see the use of the Chautauqua’s single person performances, especially in re-creating particular people and their times, and the line between the museum and the theatre would begin to blur even more with the introduction of the idea of living history. Many museums, in a bid to be competitive with theme parks, cater to the public’s fascination with the immediacy and prestige of “being there” to experience material firsthand. To this end, they employ elements of living history.

These living museums, also termed living histories, combine performance and history within a museum context. This type of performative display attained scholarly recognition in 1891 when Artur Hazelius created one of the earliest living museums at Skansen in Sweden to display Swedish folk life, becoming a prototype for similar open-air museums throughout Europe (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 39-40). “As a watchword or conceit, ‘living history’ was a coinage of the 1960s but it had been anticipated and prefigured in a series of resurrectionary movements, each concerned . . . to animate the inanimate and bring tradition back to life” (Samuel 182). The utilization of performance within

a museum setting in order to educate the public produced movements, successful to varying degrees, which vacillated between entertainment and the effective and accurate portrayal of historical material, but not within the official bounds of the museum.

The 1960s coinage of the term living history served to describe the demand for historical re-enactments. The performances shared much in common and bore a resemblance to "the street theatre and counter-culture 'happenings' of the time" (Samuel 22). Even up to this point, museums had not yet fully embraced the idea of performing history. Historical interpretation did not start as a part of museum movements until the 1970s (Roth 11). This type of re-enactment is often also called "first person historical interpretation." In this performance, actors take on the roles of, often, historical personages in order to interact with an audience of museum visitors. Although this interpretation of history had a late appearance in museums, the techniques of first person interpretation had their beginnings in the National Park Service in the 1930s, when rangers and other personnel would re-enact moments in the park's natural history (Roth 31).

Museums today readily utilize the techniques stemming from living history. First person historical interpretation is most often associated with Colonial Williamsburg and Plimouth Plantation, since these two historic sites utilize this form of performance to enliven their educational programs. Colonial Williamsburg added costumed docents in the 1930s to heighten the experience of being immersed in the American past, but these tour guides did not actively attempt to characterize historical persons. The use of first person historical interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg did not occur until around 1969, about the same time as its use at Plimouth Plantation (Anderson 31, 50). Both sites utilize performance in the form of living histories in order to educate the public, reinforcing a concrete

identity, usually nationalistic, through the subject matter. For the most part, these venues do so in as responsible a manner as possible. In addition to depicting ingenuity and progress for the United States, they also present the hardships of the colonists and the pilgrims. Further, Colonial Williamsburg has done much to bring forward the less appetizing episodes of the American past. Stacey Roth's account in Past into Present illustrates how the performance of a slave auction sparked a great deal of debate even as the Williamsburg historians sought to portray a balanced and sensitive look at the history. Even so, these venues are in effect museums, and as such, they have less flexibility in what they display to the public. Their efforts are scrutinized for accuracy, and while some romanticism is certainly involved in the performances, deviation from facts and addition of fantasy is actively prohibited.

The Renaissance festival draws from and has inherited a number of performance traditions; and, while it utilizes all of them, it does not implement any one of them in their entirety. While the festivals continue to make use of the first-person historical interpretation, they do not quite attain the level of one-person shows, such as presented in Chautauquas and on Broadway. There is no particular set script to the performance so that the interaction occurs as dictated by the unique individual encounter between the character and the spectator. These individual characters are also combined with the national acts, who specifically refer to themselves as neo-vaudevillians.

The Fascination with the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

But why play with the Renaissance? Why not the history of the United States? Many people view Renaissance festivals as an extension of the role playing game "Dungeons and Dragons" or Tolkein's Middle Earth. In both instances, the material, while fictional, enjoys association

with things medieval. The public imagination enjoys and craves this, but why? While not directly referencing the Renaissance, Umberto Eco's Travels in Hyperreality includes two essays on why the Middle Ages have come to fascinate the public at large. But what would a popular fascination with the Middle Ages have to do with a portrayal of the Renaissance? As Lowenthal noted, "altering the past also conflates it, making all its variegated segments seem somehow alike" (Lowenthal, Past 349). Such has been the case with the Renaissance festival, which typically features a broad range of history, and although it focuses on the Renaissance, elements of the Middle Ages often find expression at festivals.

Eco's first essay, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," explores the current resurgent interest in the Middle Ages. He notes that such an interest "oscillates between fantastic neomedievalism and responsible philological examination" ("Dreaming" 63). Of the two, Eco, like other proponents of history over heritage, believes that serious scholarship is the more important, and yet there is also the possibility of illumination from the standpoint of the fantasy. What and how something is fantasized can often provide insight into the society itself because "dismissing escapism as 'mere fantasy' avoids the vital questions of *what* is escaped from, *why* escape is necessary, and *what* is escaped to" (Fiske 317). Eco goes on to illustrate that the Middle Ages gave birth to all the current problems and ills of Western society, providing examples such as modern language, merchant cities, and a capitalist economy ("Dreaming" 64).

Two compelling and arguable ideas emerge from this analysis. First, is the reason Eco presents for fascination with the Middle Ages.

> Our return to the Middle Ages is a quest for our roots and, since we want to come back to the real roots, we are looking for "reliable Middle Ages," not for romance and fantasy, though frequently this

> wish is misunderstood and, moved by a vague impulse, we indulge in a sort of escapism á la Tolkien. ("Dreaming" 65)

Such desire to return to real roots is peripheral at best. While the United States certainly shares and has inherited the traditions and past of the Renaissance, Americans do not necessarily deem this history to be an immediate part of their roots. In addition, while escapism can be, and frequently is indulgent, it is just as revealing as a quest for truth. Often escapism can express an unvoiced desire within the society.

Second, Eco outlines how various interpretations of the Middle Ages can be reconstructed and the necessity for their specification. He sketches the way in which the Middle Ages has never really been "reconstructed from scratch: We have always mended or patched them up as something in which we still live" ("Dreaming" 67). For Europeans, this is certainly true. The United States, however, has only inherited the ideological abstracts, such as market capitalism, to patch up and rearrange. These reconstructions take different forms depending upon the interpretation of the Middle Ages.[1]

Eco's second essay, "Living in the Middle Ages," further develops an answer to the modern fascination with this period of history. He believes that the connection between that history and current society results from similarities between the two. Eco draws distinctions and similarities between the two citing elements required in order to make a "good Middle Ages." Observations include: breakdown of peace, rapid acculturation, and many others. In one ironic passage, he illustrates that while the lack of reliable communication and infrastructure helped to cause social breakdown leading to the Middle Ages, today, society's inundation by these two elements causes the breakdown ("Living" 77).

What really connects people to the Renaissance in the United States is not necessarily a quest for roots, but rather a sense of non-history.

While the United States associates itself with Western civilization and its traditions, the Renaissance we create here is not connected with our own American historical traditions. The history remains separated from us both in terms of space and time. Medieval and Renaissance structures, physically, do not exist to a large extent here, and the events depicted at Renaissance festivals take place earlier than most permanent American settlements. With a past so distant from American history, the sense of tradition stemming from it seems tenuous at best. Such a separation in between the Renaissance and American history gives an increased sense of safety in addition to a lack of determined identity. The ability to offer this lies in the flexibility of romanticizing history and creating fantasy. We would find it somewhat difficult to create fantasy out of American history, although history is often romanticized, as in the cases of the Antebellum and the Western Frontier.

When these fantasies or romantic visions of the history become a foundation for how people view the actual past, people are really expressing a longing, a way to counteract a feeling of modern displacement. Ethnographer and performer Joni Jones explores this sense of displacement. Her research takes the form of performance ethnography, granting her and her audiences ways of accessing cultural experience; and in them, she unravels and pieces together notions of community and identity as they pertain to ideals of place, culture, and past for African-Americans. She has found that,

> When African Americans position Africa as an authentic reality, it reflects their own feelings of displacement in the diaspora, what folklorist Regina Bendix calls a "peculiar longing" for "unmediated genuineness" that is a "reaction to modernization's demythologization, detraditionalization, and disenchantment." (Jones 12, quoting Bendix in In Search of Authenticity 8)

Some people find that they need the “unmediated genuineness” of myth and tradition because their own reality holds very little of it for them. The genuineness of daily life is greatly mediated and prescribed by community and identity. What some may long for is an opportunity to express aspects of their identity which at least feel more genuine than that expressed in everyday reality. There is a desire for an uncomplicated truth which can be drawn upon and in which people can believe. For instance, the knight—the symbol most used to conjure the Renaissance—could be compared to sports figures of the present, but unlike them he is not perceived as involved in multi-million dollar contract disputes, drunken driving incidents, sexual harassment or assault suits. Instead, he remains an unblemished paragon of heroism whose reward is the lady fair and the knowledge that good has punished evil. Is this the truth of the actor who plays the knight? No. Is this the truth of the history? Absolutely not. Yet, there remains a need for an example of courage presented by the knight that people can carry home at the end of the day. Even during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, this chivalric ideal was held by people who knew what knights were really like. Renaissance art frequently featured the warrior saint as a figure in victory over any number of enemies and monsters or the knight engaged against surrealistic dragons (Chastel 13).

An Exploration of the Terms Used in this Study

This research relies on an interdependence of all the terms used in exploring the Renaissance festival. Such interdependence makes it difficult to examine the specific terms and forces the creation of a synthetic hierarchy of importance for the terminology. While it is somewhat artificial to discreetly define the terms appearing in this research, it is still extremely helpful. These terms include community, identity, performance, history, tourism, and authenticity. Without a clear

notion of a specific definition for each term, the examination and understanding of the festivals becomes hopelessly muddy. This section is meant to provide a very brief overview of the ways in which these terms begin to overlap with one another in order to set up a way to examine how the specific terms can and will be deployed within this work.

While all the terms relate to one another in many different ways, community and identity still provide a common thread for the understanding of how the other terms are deployed. Both community and identity help to form an insight into performance, history, heritage, tourism, and authenticity as practices. Community and identity drive and are in turn driven by each practice in a process of symbol production for delineating boundaries between various groups, as was briefly covered in the section on community in the introduction. Performance is a way of both displaying and exploring notions of community in a public way. Whether this occurs in a traditional stage setting, or in the performance of specific rituals, performative events form, and is informed by, expressions of community and identity.

Similarly, community and identity inform history and heritage. The introduction explains some of the differences between the purposes of history as opposed to heritage, but both terms aid in the expression of community and identity for specific groups and individuals. History, as used by heritage, confirms and fosters membership and identity with a community. Heritage in particular uses history to construct an exclusive sense of community and identity. Typically, people utilize both to validate and reinforce their position in the communities in which they live and participate. The Renaissance festival constructs a temporary community based on a mythologized heritage. Within this mythological community, people do not have to adhere to normal identities and community roles; they are at liberty to play with and explore new identities and community

affiliations within a safe environment based on symbols which conjure and represent a particular past.

Because history and heritage are often expressed through the medium of tourism, tourism becomes a part of the equation. All three notions operate to define and separate communities and identities at national, regional, local, and individual levels. Performance joins in understanding these because tourism is largely a performed activity. Tourism, as particular type of performance, displays two communities, either locals or tourists, and much of what is performed, consciously or unconsciously, are the similarities and differences that exist between different cultures. Running through each of these terms is an underlying concern for the notion of authenticity. What is authentic? Is authenticity important and to what extent does it play a role in the performance of this particular history/heritage? Authenticity concerns community and identity because we want to have been or be a part of something that can be perceived as genuine. To this end, there has to be some standard for determining whether or not the experience obtained by the tourist or audience member is in some way genuine. This becomes even more important when examining history and heritage that is expressed in mythic or romanticized terms as it is at the Renaissance festival.

Community

The introduction began a brief explanation of Cohen's ideas on the symbolic construction of community. Community simultaneously embodies notions of similarity and difference and often utilizes history and heritage for its expression. But in order to separate similarity and difference a boundary needs to exist, and Cohen finds that these boundaries can be symbolic in nature, creating boundaries of meaning for culture. With this in mind "rather than thinking of community as an

*in*tegrating mechanism, it should be regarded instead as an *agg*regating device" (Cohen 20). Community should be thought of as means of bringing together distinct individuals who happen to share readings of the symbols bounding the group, but these individuals will still interpret these symbols from a number of positions. The resulting view of community allows for more fluid readings of community membership and maintains individual identity through an interpretation of symbols partially based on personal experience.

According to Cohen, the symbolic construction of community can refer to a "putative past or tradition." In this sense, "the past is being used here as a resource . . . The manner in which the past is invokes is strongly indicative of the kinds of circumstance which make the 'past-reference' salient. It is a selective construction of the past which resonates with contemporary influences" (Cohen 98-99). In this particular instance, the Renaissance is the past most generally evoked by the performance. But what circumstances would make this history relevant during the present. Certainly, Patterson's original festival drew upon the notions of the 1960s and the desire to be inclusive in addition to the avant-garde's new focus on the audience and its experience of art. Later, during the boom of festival building during the 1980s, the focus on the perceived prosperity and excess of Tudor England drove the content of the performance, while solidifying audience expectations of such content. Currently, festivals appear to be drawing a great deal upon elements of filmic interpretations of the past—both real and imagined.

Representing history in terms of sweeping symbols is not an unusual practice. "In our everyday discourse, the past, itself symbolic, is recalled to us symbolically. Simple 'historical' labels are made to describe complex and often ideological messages" (Cohen 101). Similarly, a symbolic representation and reading of history is more usual. These

symbolic labels often substitute for vast periods of time, boiling down the complex events of several decades or centuries into an educational sound bite. “It is the very imprecision of these references to the past—timelessness masquerading as history—which makes them so apt a device for symbolism, and in particular, for expressing symbolically the continuity of past and present, and for re-asserting the cultural integrity of the community in the face of its apparent subversion of the forces of change” (Cohen 103). At present, the world stage is a violent one torn by economic, social and religious differences not unlike those of the early and later Renaissance. People, however, have seen elements of the past that redeem history, and these are romanticized, overly so, into symbols that represent an entire epoch, occluding those other aspects which match our own time too closely. The use of symbols in such a situation, however, allows people to maintain both a sense of community and identity in times of change.

Identity

Identity is closely tied with notions of community both in terms of communal and individual identity. Most social scientists studying social, or communal, identity refer to Henri Tajfel’s position that, “Social identity will be understood as that *part* of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 2). With this in mind, social identity at the Renaissance festival can be read in two different ways. First, prior to attending the festival, each audience member identifies with a particular social group or groups, comprising their community, outside of the performance environment. Several combinations and hierarchies of allegiance to that group could form. For instance, I conceive of my

identity as largely constructed from my understanding of being a female in Western society. Other groups with which I identify would include aspects of race, social class, and familial bonds. Each audience member makes an individual hierarchical choice in the importance of membership. The higher the emotional significance or value of that group membership, the more the self-concept is built upon an understanding of the group values and how these interact with a given culture.

Second, while an individual may be conscious of this group membership to a greater or lesser degree, the Renaissance festival offers the opportunity to play with this identification, upending or reinforcing it as the spectator chooses. This can be done by reading, or "mis-reading," the historical symbols used within the festival to create new communal boundaries. Identity can be viewed as historically determined. This theory certainly has merit for understanding an individual's standing or identification with the past, although the individual's present or future identity could certainly be debatable. At the Renaissance festival, or any other living history venue, reconciling the spectator's present identity with the historically predetermined past identity is a part of the performance. Colonial Williamsburg implicitly, and in some instances explicitly, asks the audience to draw parallels with their own lives to see the similarities and differences that history has wrought. Such participation is predetermined by what was historically possible for a given group.

> I cannot assert a differential identity without distinguishing it from a context, and, in the process of making the distinction; I am asserting the context at the same time. And the opposite is also true: I cannot destroy a context without destroying at the same time the identity of the particular subject who carries out the destruction. (Laclau 100)

This leaves little room for the play and exploration of community and identity. If one takes Colonial Williamsburg as an example, women and African-Americans have a more limited choice available for group identification. Domestic and slave roles largely dominate the historical reality being presented. To assert a different identity would only serve to highlight the context from which the individual needs to escape. In turn, destroying the context (not showing the domestic chores or slavery) elides its presence in history. The Renaissance festival, based as it is in a much earlier history and a romanticized one at that, creates more flexible group identification. The individual need not be constrained by the history, especially since it is presented as play and fantasy. More rigid historical performances make this more difficult. In flexible historical performances, individuals can feel free to rearrange the hierarchy of identification with social groups, reinforcing, eschewing, or switching them at will.

While history and heritage can operate to both define and validate community as well as individual and group identity, these latter two terms have a multitude of meanings upon which people find it difficult to agree. The simplest way of looking at identity involves a sense of belonging—commonalities and difference between you and others—giving "a sense of personal location, the stable core to your identity" (Weeks 88). Because I primarily examine performance, I find it practical to look at identity from, "the theoretical premise underlying much social psychological research, particularly that done by sociologists, [which] is that of a role-making, world-shaping individual" (Dowd 264). Much of this theorizing is influenced by the work of Erving Goffman, whose work, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, establishes a methodology based on performance for examining the framework of social relationships.

Scholars often reference Goffman's notion of backstage versus frontstage behavior for individuals, which posits at least two complete

identities. The front stage role is the formal behavior given to non-group members and some special individuals. The backstage persona comprises behavior only meant to be seen by group members. The building of identity in this case follows from the need to present or create a role, or behavior, for a given audience. The integrity of either identity hinges upon the individual's ability to keep the two audiences separate. Cohen's symbolic communities can and does encompass Goffman's view of identities. "The boundary thus symbolizes the community to its members in two quite different ways: it is the sense they have of its perception by people on the other side—the public face and 'typical' mode—and it is their sense of the community as refracted through all the complexities of their lives and experience—the private face and idiosyncratic mode" (Cohen 74). The boundary and the symbols delineating it suggest two sides: one within and one without. This arrangement correlates to Goffman's front and back stage behavior and the intent of the individual, whether conscious or unconscious, to keep a distinct and safe boundary between the two.

Some scholars, like James Dowd, have disagreed with Goffman, pointing out that "[the] increase in everyday surveillance and our awareness of it make it difficult for Goffman's backstage areas to exist" (Dowd 255). The Renaissance festival can allow people to express their backstage behavior as frontstage behavior. In the public display of character, the individual can actually act out backstage mannerisms and ideas without threat of discovery. Overall, Goffman's pioneering of "symbolic-interactionist and dramaturgical perspectives on the self [has] emphasized the ways in which individuals adopt multiple roles and enact multiple performances in order to negotiate meaning, status, and position in everyday social life" (McAdams 51). The Renaissance festival simply makes playing multiple roles more overt and flexible without the same

risks or consequences in displaying them. With the multiplicity of roles comprising the self as groundwork, other social scientists have described how these roles for the individual may form.

The roles played out by an individual, as Goffman explicates them, can be seen in two different methods of causality posited through the work of Stewart Hall. He delineates between two different positions on identity. One, essentialism, regards identity "as the name for a collective 'one true self' . . . formed out of a common history, ancestry, and set of symbolic resources" (Baker 27-8). The second, anti-essentialism, stresses that cultural identity forms around points of difference. Both of these analyses can be viewed through Goffman's role-playing. Backstage behavior, both individual and shared with a group, utilizes Hall's common history and symbolic resources as a means to identify true self. Backstage behavior is often viewed as more truthful than that of frontstage behavior precisely because of a feeling of in-group camaraderie. Both backstage and frontstage behavior assume a difference in audience, requiring two different behaviors. The idea of anti-essentialism validates the differing behavior positing that the front of stage audience does not share points of commonality with the backstage group.

Performance

Looking at other fields of study, including history, in terms of performance is hardly new. Performance, as well as its metaphors, has enjoyed popularity among a wide variety of other disciplines, particularly within anthropology and social sciences. The Renaissance festival relies upon performance because it is an immersive theatrical environment meant to re-enact the Renaissance. In such a way, this performance technique suggests that the elements comprising the festival can be viewed as restored behavior. In Between Anthropology and Theater, Richard

Schechner explains restored behavior as construction of behavioral strips based on actual events that are then re-created, rehearsed, and performed. This re-creation process filters and distills the strips of behavior, refining and recombining them to produce a performance. Because of the way in which the strips of behavior are processed, the performance no longer represents the re-creation of an actual event. Instead, according to Schechner, what occurs in performance is a non-event. A non-event contains some elements of the original incident; yet creates something wholly new and different in the process of its recounting.

The performance structure at the Renaissance festival can best be understood as a venue that operates through the use of restored behavior. The introduction briefly outlined some of the different scenarios and themes used by a Renaissance festival; these form a hierarchy of behavioral strips based on aspects of life during the Renaissance. This collection of behavioral strips unfolds in accordance to a score, those components of action or behavior making up the strip. Rehearsal allows these strips, and ultimately the score, to retain malleability. Schechner states, "A score can change because it is not a ‘natural event’ but a model of individual and collective human choice" (37). In addition, these scores, according to Schechner, produce feedback, which excites or breeds commentary and more feedback, in turn, influencing subsequent accounts of that event (37). This explains the open play of historical events and persons at Renaissance festivals; the expectations of the audience and secondary sources of information on events and personas of the Renaissance create a history. At best, the performer recreates an *impression* of the event or person, riddled with the commentary and feedback of views of the event, and even prior attempts to recreate it. These impressions, often combined with popular culture and its representations of the past, “back-up” the history, reinforcing and

validating what people believe happened. For example, the Highland Fling Weekend at the MRF features a number of scenarios and characters influenced by several sources, such as the films Highlander, Rob Roy, and Braveheart. None of the subjects of these films springs from the Renaissance or its history, but because the subject matter is historical, British/Scottish in nature, and conjures ideas of adventure and romance, people want it to be part of their *idea* of the Renaissance.

History

Historiography could be viewed as operating in much the same way as a collection of behavioral strips that have been arranged in a score. Individual historians choose what to include in a written account of an event. Simplistically speaking, these inclusions themselves, technically, do not represent the actual incident, but are instead a complex distillation of multiple impressions given by people who either witnessed or participated in it, in addition to past accounts from other sources. The historian arranges and rearranges the data in order to pull forward specific ideas about the past. While this is a reductive way to view the process, it is useful in connecting historiography with performance. Like the performer, the historian also strives to represent an event, but ultimately can only produce an account of a non-event.

In order to give a more flexible interpretation of history to create play, the performance at a Renaissance festival serves as a vehicle for a translation of history in the same way that restored behavior translates and filters an event into a non-event. This translation copies the most recognizable historic events or symbols for the audience to consume in a manner most familiar and comprehensible for the largest number of people.

> [O]ur awareness of the tangible past is based mainly on copies, reflections, and subsequent impressions; most people not only cannot tell originals from replicas, they are just as pleased with the latter. The copy reflects 'the past' no less than the original. (Lowenthal, Past 295)

The Renaissance festival builds on other material, certainly, and many use historical texts as a beginning. The Renaissance festival, however, also utilizes popular views of the history in question. Audience members have expectations culled from other translations of history, and the Renaissance festival often meets and reaffirms those expectations, reinforcing other translations even as it makes its own. This helps to give audience members an unthreatening and romanticized version of the history as a common point of departure for play. The Renaissance festival does this in two ways: It simultaneously presents material that people expect from and associate with the Renaissance, and in doing so, reinforces and perpetuates these expectations.

Much, though not all, of the material utilized by the Renaissance festival is a mythic or romantic view of history. The open use of such material at the festival, while sometimes criticized in any venue portraying history, allows them to incorporate people in ways that other venues cannot. Often myth is reviled for its reliance upon archetypes that elide actual history, as Roland Barthes often noted in his work Mythologies. While this can be the case, the Renaissance festival offers it as another way in which to access the history, especially for those who do not have an individual or cultural connection to the past being represented. When used in tandem with history, myth can offer association with archetypes, often those popularized through literature and film, which in turn allow people to insert themselves into history by taking onto themselves the attributes associated with myth and its symbols. By actively inserting

oneself into the myth or the history, people can claim for themselves the associations and interpretations that are attached to it.

They can do this because such an action translates history into symbols which can be read by various communities, and history as it is portrayed at the renaissance festival relies heavily upon symbols. Rather than offer historical recreations of specific events, they offer the audience symbols, such as knights, monarchy, jousts, feasts, drinking. These symbols are meant to evoke the past for a large audience of disparate individuals. “Symbols are effective because they are imprecise. Though obviously not contentless, part of their meaning is ‘subjective’. They are, therefore, ideal media through which people can speak a common language” (Cohen 21). Just what is this common language at the festival? In some ways, it is performance. Most people understand that performance is coherent because it is based on symbols, and their interpretations, which they can agree upon to an extent. The symbols become historical markers telling the audience where they are in history, and these symbols need to be general enough for recognition by the audience. If, in performance, the audience is to understand that a particular person is the king, then there will need to be symbols in place for that reading to occur. A crown or other symbol of kingship is necessary or the connection cannot be made. Such is also the case in performing a history.

If the audience cannot recognize some of the larger elements as “Renaissance” then the construction of this new community, the Renaissance festival, cannot be created. “Change in structural forms is matched by a symbolic recreation of the distinctive community through myth, ritual, and a ‘constructed’ tradition” (Cohen 37). These are in place to reassert the distance between the community and the outside world. The Renaissance festival has to assert its own identity as a community through the invention and interpretation of tradition both real and imagined. This is

absolutely necessary for the creation of identity play. The average audience member is both of and outside of the community built by the festival, and such a position frees them to participate in the performance in unconventional ways. They can take on identities here that are forbidden elsewhere with impunity.

Tourism

While a number of definitions of "tourist" have been put forward over the years, most scholars agree with Eric Cohen's estimation that at the most basic level a tourist is one who travels to a place distant from his home for a short period of time for the express purpose of leisure. Other researchers in this particular field have delineated between types of tourists—ethnic, cultural, and historical—and how tourism operates from the perspective of the tourist and the people or places being visited. These studies incorporate issues similar to those facing history and heritage. Questions of authenticity often arise in conjunction with the cultural expectations of the tourists. Do the performances of a culture accurately depict the culture or do they conform to tourist expectations? Some question whether this matters at all. Driving several concerns is the level of cultural commodification associated with tourism. It is questionable whether a person can a person purchase a genuine experience of a culture or not, especially given the nature of touristic experience and its variability. Each person has a distinct notion of what constitutes an authentic experience which may or may not agree with another. In addition, these issues would affect notions of both community and identity. Many of these issues can be explored within the environment set up by the performance at the Renaissance festival.

The Renaissance festival encompasses the different types of tourists to a greater or lesser degree. In terms of ethnic tourism, audience

members watch "villagers" go about everyday Renaissance existence. Cultural tourism manifests in the shows taken in by the audience, which include a range from Shakespeare and *commedia del arte* to the craft demonstrations of the blacksmiths and glassblowers. Finally, because the premise of the performance is based on the Tudor Renaissance, the Renaissance festival becomes a destination of historical tourism as well. Where the spectator chooses to place her identity will also be a determining factor within this definition. Does she choose to remain a spectator? If so, then she remains a tourist in a classical sense. Should she choose to participate within the performance, however, she could become the object of the tourist gaze. In joining the community within the Renaissance festival, she "goes native," so to speak, becoming the focus of ethnic, cultural, and historical tourism.

The quest for authenticity both in content and experience also comes to the fore in examinations of tourism; tourists seek out authentic experience. The spectators of living history, whichever venue they choose to visit, go to a specific environment meant to represent a specific place at a specific time. As such, they can be considered tourists. Why? Because, as tourists, people search for experience. While our day-to-day lives entail and embody experience, experience from a touristic standpoint means something much more, something beyond the everyday (Mills 73). When applied to heritage industries and living histories, "[t]he aim of the experience is to show heritage, unlike history, alive and kicking" (Lowenthal, Heritage 168). Performance, especially, can offer what the tourist craves. It also allows the spectator access to something beyond the fixed past. As Lowenthal observes, "a fixed past is not what we really need, or at any rate not all we need. We require a heritage with which we continually interact, one which fuses the past with the present" (Lowenthal, Past 410). If this is the case, then interaction with the past is

necessary. But people must have the option of interaction, and not every presentation of history allows for this. Individuals' connection with the past may be elided, glossed over, or even painful, depending upon the material and the presentation. Tourists in this instance will not wish for experience, nor will they be likely to seek it out. But who exactly are tourists, and what do they want?

In looking at the types of tourism, anthropologists particularly concern themselves with the question of authenticity, while at the same time they have difficulties defining what this means in its application to heritage. The assumption is that tourists seek not only experience, but that such experience must in some way be authentic. Convoluted, the question of authenticity seldom yields a satisfactory answer. In fact, a 1994 meeting of the American Society for Applied Anthropology stressed the importance of heritage tourism in regard to social science. Myra Shackley summarizes the findings of the conference:

> It is theoretically impossible for a visitor to gain an authentic experience and elements of national heritage (such as King Arthur and Robin Hood in the UK) are frequently invented. Why, then, not present model cultures or sanitize cultures and place them on display? . . . it [is] the quality of visitor experience that matter[s] to the tourism industry, not the authenticity of the attraction—but this is a pragmatic view unlikely to appeal to cultural purists. (Shackley 397)

The MRF's placement of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I on stage with each other causes little stir because the quality of the experience delivers the expectations of the spectators. Often the drive for authenticity tends to be an appeal to one's expectations. That the history does not match the event matters little to the audience; they only wish for their expectations to be met. Few of these people will represent Shackley's

purist. As individuals, tourists define the way in which they approach the experience. As a result, they will choose to define the touristic experience in a myriad of ways.[2] So to say that a spectator's experience will be purely one of entertainment or escapism, whether authentic or not, is somewhat reductive. In fact, ambiguity in interpretation can be an asset as seen in the understanding of symbolic community. If a subject is too narrowly defined, its success within a broader audience base can be lost (Lewis 29-30). Like a tourist, the spectator at the Renaissance festival enjoys several layers of interpretation and experience not limited solely to the realm of entertainment. This does not, however, answer the slippery question of what authenticity is.

Authenticity

Regina Bendix, in In Search of Authenticity, makes an extensive examination of authenticity and traces its permutations and importance within the field of folklore studies in both Germany and the United States. While she sees an understanding of authenticity as important and acknowledges the human need for it, she would like to remove authenticity as an overriding concern because of its artificiality and the continuing difficulty of ever defining it (7). She does, however, recognize why people find it necessary as a way to legitimize both the subject being authenticated as well as its authenticator (7).

In tracing the shifting definitions of authenticity Bendix often references the work of Lionel Trilling, who notes, as does Bendix, that the concern for authenticity first appears during the Renaissance. The Renaissance, however, did not use authenticity as a term. Instead, they spoke of sincerity (Trilling 12). So what is sincerity and how did it formulate what has come to be known as authenticity? Early use of the sincere "referred primarily not to persons but to things" and was derived

from the Latin *sincerus* meaning “clean, or sound, or pure” (Trilling 12). During the Renaissance the term came to mean an “absence of dissimulation or feigning or pretence” (Trilling 13). This meaning of sincerity proves both crucial and illuminating to the culture of the time.

As noted in the introduction, the Renaissance was a period of great upheaval and was also a period of time where social mobility, though difficult, was at least possible. “The sixteenth century was preoccupied to an extreme degree with dissimulation, feigning, and pretense” (Trilling 13). These were dangerous times. All that had been known—politically, socially, economically, religiously—was in the process of being radically altered. Knowing who and what was authentic became important in dealing with everyday life in the cities of Europe. “It is surely no accident that the idea of sincerity, of the own self and the difficulty of knowing and showing it, should have arisen to vex men’s minds in the epoch that saw the sudden efflorescence of the theatre” (Trilling 10). Performance pulls authenticity into question. Such a question of authenticity in performance during the Renaissance makes an examination of authenticity as applied to the Renaissance festival fascinating, especially because of the shifting of authenticity’s definition and social importance during that period. “Modernity is a label for the transformations brought about through the decline of feudal estates and the emergence of bourgeois societies and nation-states . . . Within this transformation, the discourse on ‘authenticity’ as a desirable state of being or acting was a significant element” (Bendix 25). History shows that the Renaissance was a period of enormous upheaval. People were rushed through new discoveries, new expanded global economics and new political structures. The Church and the Medieval mind were incapable of keeping pace and integrating the change as it occurred—even if they had wanted to.

Bendix feels that today, authenticity is, at best, defined as "a quality of experience;" one moving the individual in the experience of the moment "which on reflection crystallize(s) into categories and in the process lose the immediacy that characterizes authenticity" (Bendix 13-14). Such an ephemeral view of authenticity is not unlike performance, where the act of performance itself is always already in the process of passing from immediacy into reflection. Experience, then, is the core of authenticity. "*Authenticity, unlike 'primitive society', is generated not from the bounded classification of an Other, but from the probing comparison between self and Other, as well as between external and internal states of being* (author's italics)" (Bendix 17). Authenticity is generated from the immediacy of experience where the individual is in a moment of contemplation which can be wholly external—comparing the self to someone or something outside of the self—or reflective and internal. The relationship between the actors and their audience creates an environment of authenticity based on the experience of the performance. The audience explores through the actors a comparison between themselves and that which is presented both on an external and internal level.

At the Renaissance festival this process can become more visceral, enhancing the quality of the experience for those who chose to participate in identity play as people put on new characters. What the performance asks of the audience is to construct a personal relationship with the symbols evoking the history one which will hinge on an internal and external dialogue with the past and the way in which it is presented. When we find ourselves in this position the "[i]nvocations of authenticity are admission of vulnerability, filtering the self's longing into the shaping of the subject" (Bendix 17). We interpret this past and its symbols in terms of the self and the longings that we might find represented by these symbols.

In her own work, Joni Jones struggles with and explores the question of authenticity, in particular authenticity and its expression in performance ethnography. Jones has examined and applied some of Bendix's ideas on what actually constitutes authenticity in terms of performance and what constitutes authenticity for "liveness."

> Authentic performance occurs when the details of that performance are so precise that they create an authentic identity—a culturally specific, distinctive, comfortable, full identity. Authentic performance relies on the poise and improvisational skills of the performer, for it is through improvisation that the performer must imaginatively invent reality and discover what feels true for the "character." (Jones 13)

This is what the actors strives to do at the Renaissance festival and what some spectators do prior to ever setting foot inside one. Some actors succeed to a greater or lesser degree than others based on talent and experience. It is no different for the audience member. Like the actor, some people will have a greater facility for creating characters, and the more experience the spectator has with attending festivals perhaps the better. Both groups will also increase precision of the character, and history, to the level at which they feel that they can comfortably execute it. If the person hates being dirty than perhaps portraying the local beggar would be a poor character choice. Similarly, the historical events portrayed are under constraints as well. Performance typically condenses chronological events and does not always show all that happens in a story in view of the audience. The festival is no exception. Choices are made based on an ability to successfully execute them in performance. There is not time, the desire, or the budget to faithfully display the entire Tudor dynasty.

Authenticity and its application to the Renaissance festival is rooted in the performance. "Performance itself create[s] a particular authenticity that is rooted in the present, in the experiences here and now that are collaboratively and improvisationally generated" (Jones 14). The performance of history at the festival is deeply rooted in the experience of the present moment even as it uses history to do so. The actors and the audience members create a performative experience relying upon collaboration and improvisation to engender an immersion in the environment. The immediacy of the environment and the actors' and audience members' ability to give a truthful representation of the characters they choose to portray—often representing aspects of themselves filtered through an interpretation of the history and its symbols—make the performance at the Renaissance festival authentic.

History versus Heritage in Performance

The performance at the Renaissance festival relies upon immersing the audience in the history, either whole or in part, in order for the presentation to be effective. People's desire to fully immerse themselves in an historical period is not a particularly unusual form of entertainment, nor is it an unheard of methodology for the study of history. Michele de Certeau, in his work The Writing of History, explains two different methods, of which immersion is one. The first method bases itself in the comprehension and understanding of the conditions producing the history being examined, while another claims to offer a direct experience, a "lived experience," resurrected from the past (35). The two views of history often foster conflict between scholars and practitioners of living history, and to a certain extent, they do conflict, but the desires and objectives expressed by both are not necessarily at odds.

Both of these views stem from the need to know where we originated, what happened to make us who we are, and how this process unfolded. The two positions for examining history seek to validate the past and confirm events as they happened. The promise for a direct experience, however, becomes a more satisfying choice for some people. Understanding what happened through textual accounts can confirm events, but many attach a greater prestige to a direct experience of the history. It is perceived as a more valid source of information. The sequence of different "House" series on PBS plays to this belief. The people of Frontier House, which premiered on PBS in April of 2002, positioned themselves as authorities with a greater understanding of the past because they directly experienced it. The producers of the documentary, meticulously culling the personal feelings of the participants, present these feelings as comparable to those of the people who actually pioneered the American frontier. Written accounts, while important and insightful, cannot grant the feeling of being there.

When scholars, such as Kevin Walsh, who takes issue with the portrayal of history at venues such as Disneyland, express concern over the combination of performance and history, it is not because they find these two areas to be mutually exclusive. The disagreements usually arise between proponents of history and proponents of heritage, who often use elements of performance. The introduction explained how history and heritage serve different purposes: one inclusive and the other exclusive. The historian produces for a wide audience, disseminating information on a large scale in order to explain events to everyone. Heritage reaches out to a smaller audience of people, who usually share a group identity or community. Like heritage, performance, due to the nature of the medium, reaches a smaller number of individuals and tends to focus on specific themes running through a given content. Performance and heritage are

both meant for a smaller number of people, maintaining exclusivity of dissemination for a specific group. At this point, many historians, though certainly not all, take umbrage with proponents of heritage. They feel that accuracy and authenticity are often sacrificed or completely ignored in heritage sites, at least in part because they cater to the expectations of a specific group of people—tourists.

How Performance and Heritage inform Community and Identity

As I have mentioned earlier, performance and history, as they create heritage, are expressly used to impart group identity to members of a given community whether on local or national levels. History reinforces and supports community and identity by providing a means to separate one group from another. Heritage uses history in such a way as to validate the separation and feelings of group allegiance. In this way, people manipulate and mold history to their own views and needs. This process occupies the attention of David Lowenthal in The Past is a Foreign Country, and The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History. Rather than arguing which is more authentic, history or heritage, he examines the purposes of both, acknowledging the two sides of the argument. These works devote themselves to understanding why and how people desire to visit the past, how they create it, their interpretations, and the end usages. "To change the past is none the less a compelling goal. It sharply contrasts the history we can have with the history we might want" (Lowenthal, Past 27). Such a practice aids in the creation of heritage. To know or simply read about the past is no longer enough; people want a relationship with it; "what is needed is the sense of intimacy, the intensely familiar interaction with antiquity" (Lowenthal, Past 378).

Performance at the Renaissance festival does this in a uniquely personal way. Individuals can create their own interpersonal bond with the

past via the bridge of first person historical interpretation. The spectator can have conversations with the actors, asking them questions about the characters and their lives in the Renaissance. While Renaissance festivals utilize the recognition of great historical personages, they also give some voice to the common men and women who also participated in the historical process by presenting the performance in the setting of a village. In addition, spectators can create a personal connection to the past through the creation of their own character to play.

Beyond the needs of the individual, Lowenthal provides an excellent insight into the cultural need to experience history. In The Past is a Foreign Country, he explores how the past has become separated from our own present and how, even in the act of separating ourselves from this "foreign place," more of the present is revealed through current views of the past. He presents two themes, which particularly relate to the Renaissance festival. First, Lowenthal asks how we become aware of our past and how we react to this awareness. Here, performances of Renaissance festivals and living histories serve as tools by which the public can explore such an awareness of their own past. Second, Lowenthal examines how and why changes are made to this understanding of the past and how these changes affect us. As shown earlier in the discussion of Schechner's restored behavior, history is malleable, since an ability to absolutely recreate the event is denied in the very act of making that attempt. Performance makes changes to history, and usually, such changes involve choices based upon the people performing and their audience. In the same way, Lowenthal examines how a culture manipulates history, setting it apart from the present while simultaneously putting its own stamp upon that history.

In addition to examining how and why people build history in a particular way, Lowenthal has also observed the use of history in the

building of heritage. His work, The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History, documents the practice of heritage. He notes that the current heightened interest in and concern for heritage dates to about 1980 (Lowenthal, Heritage 4). Current controversies over the question of authenticity, however, set history opposite heritage. Many critics of heritage find fault with the authenticity of the presentation. Proponents of heritage validate their activity by pointing to the intimacy of and pride in history used in such a context. While both history and heritage have specific goals and concerns, laudably outlined in Lowenthal's text, it is not necessarily a problem of which one represents Truth.

> Heritage . . . is not a testable or even a reasonably plausible account of some past, but a *declaration of faith* in that past. . . . It uses historical traces and tells historical tale, but these tales and traces are stitched into fables that are open neither to critical analysis nor to comparative scrutiny. (Lowenthal, Heritage 121)

Even history cannot maintain that it alone has access to the truth of the past. Heritage has a similar difficulty. Defining heritage remains somewhat slippery and the concept is best examined in light of what it *does* rather than what it *is*.

At the Renaissance festival, much of the material presented, particularly the way in which it is presented, is heritage rather than history because of the extensive mythological and romanticized treatment of the period. History at the TRF, MRF, and Scarborough Faire serves as raw material in creating a story about England for U.S. consumption. They use the most exciting bits and pieces from history in general in order to build a spectacle for spectator interaction. The final creation more closely resembles the audience's expectations and romantic dreams of the Renaissance; it is these in which people put their faith. The Renaissance festival spins history into heritage. The Renaissance has been depicted for

so long as a wondrous period of discovery, art, culture, and courtliness. No matter that there was a darker side or that perhaps views of the Middle Ages have blurred with those of the Renaissance. People prefer to believe in the romantic past. Such a view is not wholly open to critical appraisal since it really is not meant as a truthful or accurate depiction of the period.

In the end, much of heritage markets itself as some type of consumption typically for tourists, sometimes for profit, but also as identity, and, in doing so, manipulates the presentation of history. The means by which heritage alters history can take three forms: updating the past, "highlight[ing] and enhanc[ing] aspects of the past now felt admirable," or "expung[ing] what seems shameful or harmful by consigning it to ridicule or oblivion" (Lowenthal, Heritage 148). Renaissance festivals utilize varying combinations of all three in the presentation of historical material for spectators. The feasts use modern foods, the joust rivets the attention of the audience over most of the other types of performances highlighting a juxtaposition of violence and chivalry, and aspects of disease or squalor are consciously omitted. The presentation must be reasonably appetizing for the public. Current notions of cleanliness and hygiene become important rather than the authenticity of the experience. Just as tourists want the flavor of foreign destinations, this does not mean that they are willing to forego comfort or some small aspects of familiarity. They would like to view the native lives of the Kalahari bushmen as long as they can go to McDonald's for lunch.

Often heritage sites make use of living history or first-person interpretation, and this practice opens heritage sites to attacks concerning historical authenticity and bias. Since the actor or practitioner can never escape her own cultural indoctrination and experience, disagreements over the efficacy of living history often center on the impossibility of ever really being able to understand completely, and thus accurately portray a

person from the past. “The usual re-enactment experience will include actors who can delineate the factual elements of the past but these use modern speech and methods; they ‘preclude intimacy’ with the past” (Lowenthal, Past 296). Historical figures being presented, as a product of their cultural upbringing, ultimately remain hidden from complete interpretation because the actors are, in turn, always a product of their own cultural upbringing as well. In the end, the entire environment and the material presented falls somewhat short; alteration of the past becomes necessary for its presentation.

Purposes for the presentation of a given past and the types of alterations required have given rise to different forms of living history that aid in alleviating some of the pitfalls inherent in any presentation of history. Jay Anderson, a living history practitioner and scholar, has broken these down into three basic groups. In the first category, the primary interest is in “using simulation as a mode of interpreting the realities of the past more effectively” (Anderson 12). In such an instance, “the site becomes . . . both the time machine and the destination of time travel” (Anderson 12). The second type of living history utilizes “simulation as a research tool” (Anderson 12). For example, places such as Plimouth Plantation encourage scholars to live in the village while working on various projects. Jay Anderson, in particular, shares his own experience of recreating the brewing process used by the early settlers. He spent over a month living in the village in order to understand fully the importance of brewing and the conditions for the process. In the third category, history buffs also use living history for a variety of personal reasons ranging from future shock to a love of the time periods being recreated. Such people include Civil and Revolutionary War re-enactors and the members of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

Some living history practitioners, such as those above, contradict some assumptions that ensuring accuracy and authenticity when presenting heritage is not paramount. Anderson outlines, in great detail, the membership requirements of some groups in addition to their aspirations to complete accuracy. For example, buckskinners, as they refer to themselves, work to recreate the life of American mountain men, like fur trappers. Within their group, there are levels of individual achievement, one of the highest being *hiveranno*.[3] For some living historians, such as the Buckskinners, working toward a *hiveranno* degree has more requirements than many doctoral programs. The requirements are practical skills rather than abstract knowledge, including knowledge of Plains Indian handtalk (they require fluency) and "tracking a man or animal under natural wilderness conditions" (Anderson 160). Joining such a group requires an intense dedication that many people do not possess. It also assumes that the person wishing to be involved wants to strive for the highest level of authenticity possible. Further, it gives the outsider the impression that one must have a level of expertise in order to participate. In many ways, this mindset excludes the possibility for simple play.

If the rules of authenticity within a given venue remain too strict, the likelihood of uninitiated individuals to engage in play is slim. They do not have the knowledge to play safely in the environment created by the expert. Further, the desire for authenticity acts as a factor for the predetermination of roles within the living history. As a woman, my role within the authentic Buckskinner world is limited to the area around the campfire. While Renaissance festivals tend to favor living history for interpretive purposes, and many actors and shopkeepers working there are history buffs, the use of the festival for purposes of scholarly research simply does not occur. Although this would certainly be an interesting use

for the sites, providing some audience draw, the current structure of the fairs makes this practice difficult.

The Difficulty of Historical Authenticity at the Renaissance Festival

Other types of historical and heritage venues have several advantages not available to the Renaissance festivals. A single Renaissance festival does not operate continually throughout the year. The sites may have permanent buildings, but the festival itself is meant to have a finite number of performances each year. Originally, and even today, Patterson's California faire remained impermanent, the form of the "village" changing each year. Such a site does not provide the stability and regular staff required for historical research under such conditions. In addition, the festival, created as edu-tainment, relies heavily upon entertainers to convey the material. While such people may be well-versed in their character and the time period, they are not professional researchers or historians *per se*. Their experience with the techniques and methodologies required in a more research-oriented living history would be limited at best. Finally, many festivals, though not all, do not employ dramaturges or historians on their staffs. This practice often leads to an *ad hoc* approach to the history. As mentioned previously, it is not uncommon to see an amalgam made of history with the material presented giving a wide range of time periods, as illustrated by the gladiatorial combat presented during reign of Elizabeth I at the MRF.

Other difficulties exist when attempting to create an authentic representation of the history at a Renaissance festival. Achieving a higher the level of authenticity leaves less room for play. The closer one gets to the historical truth, the more predetermined the individual's role in the history becomes. Such a focus defeats the purpose of the performance offered at the Renaissance festival. Often the very notion of open play

with history causes the dismissal of the festivals from formal discussion. Play with history, in any form, opens it up to all the various translations and expectations. I have found that this, more often than not, includes aspects of myth, legend, and folklore. Authenticity implies, for many, something set in stone. Once authenticity has been achieved, any changes appear to diminish what is being presented. Like an artifact in an exhibit, authenticity separates the person from the object; they may look but they cannot touch. Participation remains limited. Myth offers a way to break the glass by allowing a person to connect with the past in a way other than the historically accurate. A person can insert herself into the archetype of the myth, which is not historically predetermined, in conjunction with or opposed to the heritage. In this process, a person can play with the notions of community and identity that traditional heritage venues seek to solidify.

For some people, studying Renaissance festivals gives credence to the way in which history is presented and gives weight to fantasy in its production. This could be viewed as a problem; however, in the end it merely reinforces the need to study such festivals. Fact and fiction are easily compared at Renaissance festivals. The festivals make no claim to present pure history, and their portrayals more often than not contain a great deal of tongue-in-cheek humor concerning what they present. Even a vague knowledge of Renaissance history allows the average viewer to differentiate between actual history and what is presented. In fact, were the Renaissance festival to adhere to historical accuracy, the willingness to play would suffer. Scholars and practitioners both believe that there is a "reality threshold." If the material is too authentic it threatens people, either offending or appalling them (Roth 23). In fact, "sanitization is necessary to render the experience more user friendly" (Shackley 396). Often, in presenting historical material, there is a sense of the sacredness of that history. Much of the sense of sacredness stems from history's

purpose in maintaining and confirming social identity. Play within this segment of history would undermine that identity. Further, even at these venerable historical sites, a level of historical flexibility must be in place. The public does not readily respond to a textbook recitation of history, thus the popularity of living history. The nature of performance, however, does dictate some change of the material being presented. If the audience does not find the performance palatable or interesting, there is the risk that they will leave and not return for future performances. This is a difficulty for all venues, not just the Renaissance festival.

These performances and others like them become marketable destinations commodifying the history. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, one scholar examining this trend as it applies to museums and other more traditional heritage destinations, stresses the influence of economics upon the venue and their ability to provide experience for consumption by the tourist. The experience, in some way, must reflect audience expectations; it must look "authentic" or "real." In addition, it must be "new," something not experienced before. "The irreducibility of strangeness, a feature of tourist discourse more generally, inscribes on the geography of the exotic a history of receding thresholds of wonder: as exposure exhausts novelty, new ways to raise the threshold of wonder must be found" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 72). Authenticity, applied to the Renaissance festival, does and does not hold the same meaning as other tourist sites. The spectator wishes the free play within the past and not necessarily a historically accurate depiction.

With an increase in historical accuracy, the festival becomes the same as other living history venues with a predetermined place for the spectator to occupy. The level of accuracy often changes the purpose of the venue to education, and the shift keeps the audience on the outside of the community presented. The Renaissance festival, by playing with

history, sidesteps the problem of exclusion in the presenting history. The free play with the history in performance and the ability of the spectator to play with identity allows for constant novelty. Should the spectator become bored, she has the option of changing her identity. Further, the manipulation of history allows the Renaissance festival to invent a wider variety of traditions without having to adhere to historical precedent.

Ultimately, the many definitions of authentic and ways in which to determine authenticity underline the fact that authenticity is not fixed. While tourists may crave and seek authentic experience, they really want an experience that lives up to their own expectations. Renaissance festivals, in utilizing a combination of restored behavior, history, and interactive performance, enable the spectator to do achieve this end. To examine the performance of history from the standpoint of "Is it authentic?" and "Is it educational or purely entertainment?" misses the point. "If authenticity is not fixed . . . in fact authenticity may gradually emerge, even in situations that are eminently counterfeit" (Kennedy 182). If you use something often enough for a task, it then becomes appropriate—authentic. Use a screwdriver to pound nails; it becomes a hammer. Whether the site is real or not, it still conjures associations with the real reinforcing a projection of authenticity. This is especially so if the spectators/tourists in question decide to play with notions of their own identity. What happens at the Renaissance festival is a search for an authenticity of self within a history. Traditional authentic experiences may reinforce notions of community and identity that the spectator does not see within her. In participating within the environment, a "historical" suspension of disbelief must occur. Without this suspension, they cannot break with historical predetermination enough to explore possible identities.

Building Community and Identity through Play

The individuals who choose to play do not do so in a vacuum, but instead they share with and encourage one another through doing so in an immersive and mutually agreed upon environment. In the introduction, I quote Izzo's notion of *temenos*, a special area cut off from the everyday world operating on special rules, acting as a haven in which interactive theatre may occur. Without the *temenos* of the Renaissance festival, individuals would not have the safety of play. Part of this safety comes from the fact that the activity *is* play. As Renaissance festival director Gary Izzo points out, real life and its choices all have permanence; any act in our everyday lives cannot be undone. He points out that "*permanence* is the basis for the fear in our lives . . . Play space is *impermanent*" (Izzo 13). Another part of the safety comes from the feeling of community created within the festival atmosphere. "Our 'selves,' then, are as much group projects as they are the construction of individuals" (Dowd 259). Schechner notes that restored behavior is one way in which the self can be constructed. "Restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become" (38). Because the Renaissance festival encourages new constructions of identity for the individual as well as new group affiliations, participation in the performance can encourage a questioning of how these are determined and what they mean.

With relaxation, familiarity, and a willingness to play, the Renaissance festival creates an environment capable of nurturing this sense of community. Not only has the festival built a *temenos* wherein people have a given set of rules and a safe place to experiment with identity, but it has also given the spectator the opportunity to obtain experience. "Play tends to build community through shared experience"

(Izzo 13). Performance holds multiple types of experience for both the actor and the audience member. For the actor, there is the experience of the performance and the interaction with the spectators. In addition, experience comes from the communal atmosphere built between the actors themselves—as actors. For example, most festivals have a morning meeting prior to the opening of the gates. The meeting allows the directors to pass on information concerning the day and communicates any last-minute changes in the schedule. This meeting is also a snapshot of the actors' community before they part ways to become the characters in the village. At the MRF, actors, half-dressed in a hybrid of modern and Renaissance clothing, greet one another and share breakfast. There are casual warm-ups and singing. A performer in tights eats a breakfast burrito while nearby an actress in ripped jeans drinks coffee, as another actress standing behind her laughs and laces up her embroidered corset. Such familiarity expands to include the shop owners and the audience.

The comfort with which the actors and shopkeepers work with one another and the audience reinforces the feeling of safety for the people who wish to participate. The actors have been trained to incorporate the spectator into whatever scenario may be in progress. The improvisational training, especially Wirth's methods, focuses on the ability of the actor to make the process easy for the audience, allowing them to take on a character. This process works in a manner similar to reading a good novel.

> The projection of the viewer into the character appears to be involuntary, as though he or she is seduced by the attractiveness of the text to submerge his or her own identity into that of a fictional character. Central to this process is a kind of wish fulfillment, for the seducing character is claimed to embody the unsatisfied desires . . . of the viewer. (Fiske 170)

The process above describes the reading of a text. Here, reading the Renaissance festival, the romanticized environment coupled with the characters, that interact with the visitor as a member of that environment, acts as a seducing factor for some spectators.

Conclusion

By presenting the past as a foreign country one can visit, I have come to understand that it can be performed as a community into which we can be inserted. Because the Renaissance festival encourages the exploration of identity beyond that determined by the history of the historical performance, it carries the potential to change the ways in which individuals view themselves, performance, history, and community. The environment created by the performance grants a freedom with the past not necessarily found in similar living history venues. Within this framework, history becomes an object of play that can allow individuals to speak out about themselves or their own communities in an open a dialogue without having to rely upon predetermined representations.

Because performance and history aid to build and reinforce community and identity, the study of Renaissance festivals is an important one; it allows people the opportunity to play with history in order to explore community and identity in ways unavailable to them. Coupling live performance to history and heritage provides a powerful way to build community and identity by granting the potential for the audience to participate in their construction. The performance does so by allowing spectators to play with notions of community and identity by using elements of fantasy to diffuse historical predetermination. Even as history presents values consistent within a community, there is a need to explore and sometimes challenge them. Festivals offer a safe space in which to do so.

Spectators at a Renaissance festival are free to enter into the performance, or not, and to explore, contradict, or reinforce their identities within the community. Because the Renaissance festival provides a more fully immersive environment which allows the spectator to enter at will, these performances can encourage play on the part of the audience. Part of this ability stems from the festivals create a more open and symbolic interpretation of community, one constructed through an interpretation of history as a set of symbols which can have both specific and individual readings.

If performance has the power to create and engender community, then one of its most important elements must lie in its ability to draw people into the performance and give them a stake in its outcome. The Renaissance festival does this through a reliance on open play where people may enter into the performance freely. By doing so, each person creates an opportunity to display aspects of self and community in terms of how the individual wishes they could be or how she wishes others to view her. History, heritage, and the tourist gaze all become components in building this identity and guiding it through the community. Each Renaissance festival will have in place components aiding the spectator in accomplishing this. Of all the components one of the more important is interpersonal interaction. This interaction fueled by the actor aids in both building a community for the spectator to enter as well as enabling and encouraging the spectator to experiment with identity inside this community. The human interaction can quickly bring together a disparate collection of individuals and turn them into a community.

Endnotes

[1] Eco outlines ten kinds of Middle Ages that can be discussed: as pretext, ironical visitation, barbaric, romantic, philosophical, nationalistic, decadent, philological reconstruction, tradition (mystic/occult), and as an expectation of the coming millennium.

[2] ". . . spectators are consumers of a cultural product, visitors to another realm . . . [T]hey will define that realm in various ways—as art, heritage, history, education, recreation, amusement, frolic—but whatever meanings they ascribe, these visitors are in the most straight-forward sense cultural tourists" (Kennedy 181).

[3] According to Bill Odom, aka *Trois Pattes de fleuve de Prêtre* (Three Paws of Priest River), a practicing buckskinner, the term *hiveranno* means an experienced mountain man. First used by the Voyageurs, and later the Mountain Men, the appellation indicated one who had lived many years in Indian country. It has come to mean "One who winters over," or a true mountain man. It is used by the AMMA (American Mountain Man Association) as part of a program of steps or achievements the members undergo. It means that the person is a master of the craft, while an apprentice is called a pilgrim, and a Bossloper is a trapper or hunter. (Odom, email 2/19/2003).

Chapter Two

Are You Going to Scarborough Faire?:

Using Interpersonal Acting to Build Community and Identity

Introduction

At one point on my way to the Scarborough Faire, I felt certain that, somewhere, I had taken a wrong turn, since any indication of a festival failed to materialize along the rutted dirt road. Even after parking, I only had a vague notion as to the location of the front gates, and this was garnered from watching other people arrive. Because most Renaissance festivals are situated so as to hide from the modern world in a Brigadoon-ish manner, I expected this. What I did not expect was to be engaged in the performance immediately. The actors began to approach me as soon as I started to photograph the front gate of the faire.[1] I also did not expect the complexity of the opening scenario, which artfully wove actual personages and history into an engaging conflict.

While many living histories build communities, the visitor remains an outsider in many respects. Visiting heritage sites that perform the past can reaffirm current group identity, but an individual does not necessarily find incorporation into the performance as a community member. Rather, the visitor's identity is that of a time traveler, and as such, she cannot truly share identity or community with the performance except in a superficial way. She is allowed to compare herself with the material and people being presented, maintaining a temporal distance. Even so, some members of the audience will remain at an even further distance with no connection whatsoever to the heritage presented. The Scarborough Faire, however, still retains inclusiveness for the visitor. It does so by greeting the spectator as a tourist, one who exists on a level of temporal equality. By

doing so, any explication of historical particulars becomes a dramatic device, a gossipy exposition that acts to include the audience member as one who is about to become, directly or indirectly, part of the action. Approaching history in such a manner has an impact on ways in which community and identity are built and interpreted. By using both the intimacy of the environment and the history, the Scarborough Faire initiates and incorporates the visitor into the community through interpersonal relationships, which help to foster identity play in order to create a sense of belonging. Direct contact between the actor and the audience has the capability of quickly building community and validating identity play. Such a process openly advocates identity play and positively reinforces those spectators who choose to experiment with their own individual identities and community roles.

The historical material presented at the Scarborough Faire maintains a flexibility that can include any number of individual or group identities, helping to incorporate visitors even if they only participate in the performance in a touristic capacity. In some ways, individuals might feel as if they must create an identity that will fit in with the historical narrative as presented by the festival. This does not necessarily have to be the case. The Scarborough Faire demonstrates a willingness to stretch and play with historical boundaries in the opening scenario. The use of fictional characters within a plausible historical event sets the precedent for the audience members who wish to participate. In addition, members of the resident cast exemplify other identity possibilities for the audience. The interaction between the actors and audience members serves to create an area of safety where each group may be free to explore the nature of individual and group identity. While the intentional assigning of identity does not come as strongly to the fore at the Scarborough festival, their performance embodies a more fully realized and living community.

The performance at the Scarborough Faire can represent a model performance for the visitor; one in which history and entertainment are balanced, and community is offered through personal interactions. Both Gary Izzo and Jeff Wirth, leading proponents of the potential for interactive theatre, believe that the success of such a performance hinges on the actors' abilities to bring the audience into the action. Phyllis Patterson's ideal Renaissance festival largely relied on the actors to bring the performance to spectators and make them feel as if they were in the sixteenth-century. In order to do this, the ratio of performers to visitors needs to be relatively equal or there must be a higher number of actors than audience members. Such is the case with the Scarborough Faire. The interpersonal interactions can then build and concretize the feeling of community. In addition, the community already in place between the actors and the craftspeople allows them to work off of one another and the scenario realities that they create. As a result, the village looks lived-in as opposed to temporarily occupied, and this is important if the visitor is going to be invited into the community. Spectators need to be assured of a position where their identities can be constantly and consistently reaffirmed and validated.

The exploration of the Scarborough Faire in this chapter includes the background of the faire in addition to describing the environment, production structure, and the history used in framing its scenario. Once the background of the actual performance is described, the use of history, how it is deployed within the performance, an historical context, and examination of the authenticity will also be provided. These historical aspects intertwine with one another to create the fantasy of Scarborough Village. The history aids in the provision and creation of community which will be examined here: how it can be read, its relation with interaction, how audience members respond to and choose community,

and the use of interactive acting in generating it. The examination of this particular Renaissance festival finally explores the nature and construction of identity within the community and how it is played out through the history being presented.

A Brief History of the Scarborough Faire

The Scarborough Renaissance Faire was founded in 1980 near Waxahachie, Texas by Richard and Sharon Korsh, and Richard and Marsha Holeyfield. These individuals hold it as a private corporation, and it is not affiliated with or attached to any other festival within the United States. From the opening in 1981, attendance has grown from 17,500 to over 220,000 by 2002 (Sevier email 9/3/2002). While the Korshes and the Holeyfields own one hundred fifty-five acres, the actual village only comprises thirty-five acres of the total parcel with the remainder serving as parking lots, participant areas, food service areas, general offices, and maintenance facilities. Built to resemble an English village depicting life in the 1530s during the reign of King Henry VIII, the village contains two hundred thirty-five village shops manned by craftspeople from thirty-eight states. Over one thousand costumed village folk are involved in the entertainment, craft, food, game, and ride programs. In addition, each season the village kitchens prepare over forty thousand pounds of turkey legs (Sevier email 9/3/2002).

Describing the Environment

The location of the Scarborough Faire maintains the paradigm for a Renaissance festival—creating an environment as separate as possible from the present. Building an illusion of the past becomes easier the further away one gets from the present-day landscape. The introduction briefly described the location of the Scarborough Faire near Waxahachie,

Texas, which lies to the south of the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. Turning off Interstate 35 onto Farm Market Road 66, the road does not seem to lead to a large venue. Though the landscape has few trees, the rolling grassy hills in central Texas, while not particularly large, create small valleys capable of concealing a great deal. The use of a hilly and somewhat isolated location limits visual distractions, which might detract from the sense of immersion in history. In addition, the spectator receives the impression of having traveled to a more distant destination. Such a pilgrimage to a very different and distant place initiates the sense of tourism present within many Renaissance festivals, allotting the first role for the spectator to play—a Renaissance tourist.

Tourism, along with its attendant issues, affects the ways in which history and identity will manifest within the Renaissance festival. Chapter One outlined the intersection between history, heritage, and tourism, and their influence on the construction of community and identity. History, under the auspices of heritage, can become a type of tourist destination, confirming identity or group membership for the visitor. Tourists, in order to connect to history's presentation of this identity, seek both experience and their own expectations of what constitutes this experience. The Scarborough Faire, like other Renaissance festivals, seeks to provide this through immersing the visitor in history. To this end, the festival uses physical distance to represent temporal distance, creating the past as, in David Lowenthal's words, a foreign country. In such a way, the Scarborough Faire becomes a tourist destination where visitors travel to the past in order to confirm or subvert group or individual identity as they play out their touristic experience. History takes on the mantle of foreign culture and the actors become the natives that compel the tourist gaze.

When looking at the Scarborough Faire, or any Renaissance festival, the restriction of the performance space and the structure of the

performance environment define it as a tourist site. Location and dates limit performances, forcing the audience to travel and "encouraging a sense of pilgrimage to a sacred local" (Kennedy 176). While it may be an exaggeration to see the Renaissance festival as a sacred locale, it can be viewed as a place and experience apart from others in terms of behavior and experiential offerings. The wording for many of the programs and advertisements depicts the Renaissance festival as something secluded, limited, and set apart. The Scarborough Faire's brochure intimates a special experience with the description, "Discover the Adventure." Such a phrase implies that spectators could potentially find something on their own, something different, that offers an encounter separate from and unavailable in their everyday life in Texas. In many ways, the festival does mark a sacred locale, the introduction outlined such a space in interactive theatre—a *temenos* set aside for adults to play make-believe in a socially condoned place without constraints concerning who they must play.

Second, the physical shape of the Renaissance festival fosters a touristic microcosm for the viewer, giving an illusion of a real and larger historic community. In cultural tourism, performances take place in found or modeled spaces based on a circle to try to build community and a sense of enveloping the audience (Kennedy 176). Certainly, the Renaissance festival is both found and modeled. The space utilizes unused acreage, generally natural with few or no existing buildings, and set far away from developed properties. Such a site offers a neutral landscape with few referents to the actual location or time period. Texas could look like Tuscany with the correct buildings in place.

As opposed to the set up of discreet islands of buildings within the center of the village, the even distribution of shops and stages opens up the performance space. Like most Renaissance festivals, however, few, if any, domestic structures exist apart from the shops; the pavilions and stages

form the main architectural elements in the performance environment. The other prominent structure within the Renaissance festival, the tournament field, occupies a less significant position within the Scarborough Faire. Coy Sevier, the entertainment director, stated that the joust used to occupy a more central location within the festival, but it had to be moved to the far northwest corner to accommodate the building of a large feast hall. In addition, the former position of the joust performance, with its large audience attendance, interrupted the flow of spectators into the festival, backing people up at the front gate rather than helping them to spread out naturally as they entered.

Because the overall environment, including the landscape and the flow of foot traffic, has been carefully thought out, the atmosphere of the Scarborough Faire differs from that of other Renaissance festivals. While most festivals are, to varying degrees, planned, not all festivals consider the close relationship between entertainment and shop disbursement. Sometimes large increases in audience attendance can throw a wrench into the planning. The MRF, for instance, had a spike in audience numbers in the early 1990s but had not planned for it. This resulted in a foot traffic bottleneck between the main body of the festival and the tournament area; there was only one pathway between the two. While it has been corrected, the problem was not addressed for several years.

The layout of the shops and other architectural forms, in addition to the careful landscaping, gives the Scarborough Faire a feeling of intimacy. Two other factors further enhance this quality. First, the ratio between the actors and the audience members remains relatively balanced. This means that the number of audience members in their modern clothing does not necessarily exceed that of the costumed cast members. An interruption of the environment can occur when the audience members far outnumber the cast, as Richard Schechner noted in his observations of the

California Pleasure Faires and other forms of living histories (79-97). The environment risks becoming more like a theme park and, thus, less immersive for the spectator. The second factor involves a more unusual aspect for a Renaissance festival—the illusion of lived space. The Scarborough Faire gives an impression of a working, living village environment by allowing the presence of small livestock. The loose ducks, geese, and chickens give a more lived-in feeling to the environment, one that is often absent given the lack of domestic buildings at Renaissance festivals. Other animals used in demonstrations but not allowed to wander include horses, border collies, sheep, and birds of prey for hunting. Such an inclusion within the environment furthers the sense of and potential for community within the Renaissance festival.

Part of the success for developing this sense of community within the village involves the creation and acknowledgment of a larger world. The references to the world outside the village specifically call attention to long journeys, seaports, et cetera, placing the community of the Scarborough Faire within a larger world community. The map within the program positions Scarborough within the Renaissance world rather than the current one. The parking lot is not listed, but instead is marked as the village commons, erasing modern distractions even as it positions the community. The spectators become drawn in through their participation within that same community. The interaction with the actors positions them within the reality of the village, whether the actors accord individuals identities or the audience members create identities for themselves.[2]

The Structure of the Entertainment

Aiding in the building of this community, the Scarborough Faire hires a director, Sevier[3], on a year round basis. Many directors are only

hired seasonally, making turnover rates in directing staffs fairly high and affecting the continuity and leadership for the performance. The constant change can have a negative effect on the sense of community within the festival. A further sense of continuity comes from returning cast members who play a vital part in formulating the structure of the festival. According to Sevier, some of the actors study history as a hobby and have become well-read in Renaissance events, persons, and daily life. They provide many of the ideas and suggestions for the scenarios and other aspects of the festival, serving as an informal group dramaturgy.

Select actors also serve in one or more groups created to produce the festival. These actors may belong to the steering committee, the core company, or both. Members of the steering committee act as a board of directors for each year's proposed scenario and its requisite characters. As a part of its performance mission, the Scarborough Faire wishes to maintain a solid historical framework without sacrificing dramatic flexibility. Aiding in this, actors serving on the steering committee keep the scenario within the bounds of historical possibility and create a performance that will encompass these possibilities without sacrificing entertainment values. The actors comprising the core company, in Sevier's words, are "those who, if I were to leave and start a festival on Mars, would be the cast members I would not leave without" (Sevier email 9/3/2002). These actors, usually veterans of the Scarborough Faire, have proven themselves indispensable in terms of knowledge, ability, and leadership.[4] They have the authority to act in the director's stead should a show need to be changed, postponed, or re-cast in the middle of a performance day. These two groups form the center of the acting community within the Scarborough Faire. The interplay between the actors and their direct involvement in the creation of the performance

framework forms the beginning of a fictional community in which they have a stake.

A close working environment catalyzes the development of community for both the actors and the characters they play. The program for 2001 contains a brief article outlining the amount of planning and rehearsal the actors contribute, often unpaid, prior to the festival's opening. Rehearsals and workshops last for three months, but the extended rehearsal and attention to character detail allow the cast to become extremely familiar with each other, the characters, the history, and the performance scenario. Furthering the sense of being somewhere and somewhen else, the cast members and production staff incorporate a creative utilization of history to produce a cohesive performance of a Renaissance community.

History and Identity Play

Before identity play can begin, a past must be chosen which is safe enough for performing a fantasized and romantic version of history, especially when the environment is communal. The past, in some ways, has a different hold over a person than the present. Recent pasts carry more weight for the individual while more ancient pasts possess less authority. While many would, rightly, say that the United States continues to wrestle with issues of racism, I doubt that many would argue that we agonize over and are still deeply influenced by the troubles brought on by the dynastic conflicts during the War of the Roses. "The past is appreciated because it is over. . . There is a sense of the stable and the knowable in the past. It feels safe because it has already happened" (Lowenthal, Past 62). The staging of the past, at least, gives the illusion of having already happened, and this grants an atmosphere more open to

experimentation, often aided by the tendency to romanticize history. This becomes truer the further into the past one goes.

Technically speaking, any past would be useful, provided that enough time has passed to significantly separate it from the present. Any chosen period will be converted from actual history into a more highly recognizable form, relying upon romantic or mythical versions of the period presented. This transformation would be necessary in order to function well for identity play. Actual history does not always provide enough flexibility in dealing with identity. Adhering to historical accuracy in performance limits the number of potential identities available to the spectator and might in fact only serve to validate their current identity.

The idea of using a history converted into a more fantastic form provides a larger array of choices for the spectator. This also has the advantage of creating another means for the provision of safety through distance in addition to promoting a positive symbol for community. The Scarborough Faire's opening scenario, while using historical events, relies a great deal upon symbol recognition and myth. The Scarborough Faire must use some elements of myth or risk both safety and interest. Certainly, the historical picture would include Henry VIII eventually killing his queen, Anne Boleyn. While exciting and accurate, this does not completely adhere to the wider expectations of the audience nor does it promote a reading that would engender or enhance community. Instead, it promotes a sense of instability and fear. For many people, the use of Henry VIII evokes a period of "Merrie Olde England," in which, looking at most Renaissance festival food choices, people dined primarily on turkey legs and drank a great deal. This symbolic reading of the Renaissance ensures a feeling of camaraderie amongst the actors and the spectators. With such a symbol in place to represent the entire period, new community boundaries can be read in a feeling of safety and goodwill.

Further, the use of Henry VIII allows a change over in wives from year to year without having to explain why and without showing the public the philandering that led to an execution or divorce.

In playing with history, and using its romanticized aspects, the presentation of a *relatively* neutral and non-threatening history becomes possible. I say relatively neutral because, as a performance, the Renaissance festival fictionalizes part of the history presented, diffusing some of the potentially violent responses arising from the ramifications of identity. At the Scarborough Faire, for instance, in the opening scenario (described below) the Lady Katherine makes a claim to being the Duchess of York. Such a claim clearly makes her the focus of the king's anger. In the "true" historical situation, she would probably be executed, an act that might still be a possibility at the festival. The audience, however, recognizes and accepts the action as a performance. While there may be tension and play of emotion over her predicament, the audience realizes that this is play. We may play seriously without the performance—ephemeral in nature and impermanent in consequence—getting out of hand or being taken as non-play by those outside the *temenos*.

The Historical Framework for the Scarborough Faire

The Scarborough Faire primarily derives the framework for the community being performed from actual history. It does so through the main theme that encompasses the performance. The main theme of the fair helps to position the tourist within the world of the village, and by using an historical event or person, creates a flexible framework melding heritage and myth in order to produce the performance. Each Renaissance festival will handle the presentation of this framework in a different way. Generally speaking, the material is usually expressed in the opening

scenario, which is only performed at the beginning of the day, although elements of this exposition may be found in smaller scenarios presented throughout the day. Should the visitor come later in the day, a synopsis of the material can be found within the large formal program on sale inside the main gates. For the Scarborough Faire, the year is 1533 and King Henry VIII and Queen Anne Boleyn reign. The village hosts not only a visit from the king but also that of his sister, Queen Margaret of Scotland. Such a pairing ensures a broad recognition for the audience not only in their expectations of the Tudor Renaissance, but also in providing elements of Scotland made popular by such movies as Rob Roy and Braveheart. To tie the village into the royal visit and make the environment more believable, the program outlines what the visit means for the people of Scarborough.

> Also expected today is the return of our own Lady Katherine, step-daughter of Baron Jamison Rooke. Lady Katherine . . . is being escorted home from France by Lord Henry Seymour and William Tisdale, the barrister who has discovered that she is the rightful Duchess of York. They have come to tell the exciting news to the current Duke of York Henry VIII. . . . Lord Seymour knows full well that our king will not easily part with so rich and powerful a claim, and hopes that the innocent village of Scarborough does not end the day in turmoil! (1)

This lengthy description of the main characters and conflict set the content and tone for possible scenarios to unfold during the day. By tying the historical material to the performance site, the spectators can understand

what may be at stake for the village in which they find themselves. Some characters may have a more direct role in the conflict, but other, less involved, characters might venture an opinion on the situation or inquire into a visitor's thoughts on the event.

While the history presented does not reflect an actual sequence of historical events, the material does draw upon known factors within the history and incorporates them into a fictional possibility that will facilitate performance and play. Most notable in this instance would be Henry VIII's desire to legitimize his father's usurpation of the throne. Historically, anyone of the old royal blood was served with a writ of attainder that either sent them into exile or to the Tower.[5] While the general population may not know of this, history, in this case, has provided something that can be modified for use in performance. More importantly, this is done without resorting to exposition concerning the state of English politics under Henry VIII. The performance allows the actors to express the history through action rather than explication. The reactions of the court and the king allow the audience to see that Lady Katherine's claims are exceedingly dangerous and that this circumstance relates to the power of the king.

The Scarborough Faire utilizes a romanticized, some might say mythical, version of English history in order to meet the criteria of a completed and uncontrived past. Both of these are more easily met because the past is distant, romanticized, and not a part of American history. As such, it is less well-known. While Scarborough Faire does present some authentic historical material, the way in which it is used keeps the darker problems of this particular past relatively distant. The past employed by the Scarborough Faire, in actuality, carried a great deal of instability and risk for the average person in England. Religious and political unrest after Henry VIII's decision to set aside Katherine of

Aragon in 1531 left even common folk uncertain of their futures. Compounding his ongoing problem of creating a male heir, Henry VIII, fearful of dynastic contention, continued to eradicate other possible lines of secession to secure his throne. Used as part of Scarborough Faire's main scenario, this conflict, a potentially very dangerous one, arising from the dispute over York, does not reach a threatening level for the average visitor or character within the village. The partial or complete lack of immediate understanding of this particular past makes the performance interesting, entertaining, and safe at the same time. The framework of the Scarborough Faire allows the visitor either to follow the events or ignore them entirely without changing the quality of the visit.

How Framing Scenarios Operate

Each year, the opening scenario usually changes due to the necessities of marketing the history. Without changes or new scenarios, the festival cannot always maintain a large share of return customers year after year; the material risks becoming boring. The performance needs to alter itself in some fashion in order to support the spectator's desire to return for new experiences. The material cannot change too much, however, or the festival risks losing a margin of familiarity for those who have attended the Scarborough Faire for a long period of time. For them, the comfort of recognized characters is a part of the draw. For the 2002 season of the Scarborough Faire, a pirate motif was chosen to frame the performance material.

> In the spring of 1533, King Henry VIII and Queen Anne Boleyn have journeyed to the village of Scarborough . . . to meet with Duke Felipè, the ambassador from Spain. As Sir Jamison Rooke, Scarborough's Baron and Lord Mayor, gathers all villagers and visitors . . . no one suspects that every ship in Scarborough's

> harbor has been taken over by pirates! . . . [T]he dread pirate Captain Molly O'Malley, the infamous Black Rose of Ireland, and her band of brigands would dare capture King Henry's own ships, the *HMR Great Harry* and *Mary Rose*! Partnered with Molly O are Captain Stedman Hawke, and the crew of the *Jealous Vixen*. These newcomers to the pirate's life are willing to do just about anything to build their own notoriety. Join the adventure as Scarborough's villagers compete with the pirate captains for possession of the village. (www.scarboroughrenfest.com/entert/scenario.htm)

The motif keeps broad aspects of audience expectations for the Renaissance, retains some familiar characters, and promises a completely different experience than that of the prior year. The Tudor rule has been kept not only for familiarity but also for continuity for the festival itself.

Audience members can and do become attached to the place and the characters presented at a festival. Spectators who return year after year expect to see familiar faces. At the MRF, the couple who played the king and queen for several years became extremely popular among returning spectators, sometimes serving as an example for couples who were seeing a local marriage counselor. At one point, the actors could no longer continue with the MRF. It was necessary to have an entire season devoted to the marriage and coronation of the new monarchs—an actress who, in past seasons, had played a niece and another actor hired to specifically fill the role of king.

As the most recognized characters, the royalty of any given Renaissance festival rarely changes from year to year. So, rather than a complete change, aspects of the history might be altered slightly. In this instance, for the new season, the conflict arises from pirates rather than court intrigues. The pirate motif grants a level of broad recognition, like that of the Scottish additions during the previous year. People have a

general understanding of what they believe pirates were like. Offering mythic and romantic representations such as these allows the spectators to participate more easily, while granting the Scarborough Faire an opportunity to present different experiences for returning audience members.

Most Renaissance festivals, including the Scarborough Faire, present the main scenario at the opening of the front gates. Watching the performance of the opening, while not necessary for the enjoyment of the day's performances, does lend dynamism to the information for the spectator. This material begins the process of evoking, creating, and validating the community of Scarborough, giving it a concrete identity through its inhabitants. During the scenario, the action will introduce the royal court and any material required to understand the history or events within the main scenario. In addition, any weekend themes also receive introduction. The opening at the Scarborough Faire is a lengthy and comprehensive one, lasting nearly an hour, which sweeps the spectator into the history through the use of the Lady Katherine and her claims to York. Such an event would be plausible within dramatic license, and the use of a few fictional characters in this position ties the history with the village more closely, fostering community.

The framing scenarios utilized at the Scarborough Faire are unusual from those of other festivals in their adherence to a more historically accurate perspective of Henry VIII and his reign. Rather than sidestep the complications of his monarchy, they embrace it to the degree that it may provide drama and entertainment. The Scarborough Faire does temper the information to an extent, but their doing so gives more weight to the community being created by the history. The symbols used still reflect the picture of a merry England where there are rogues and scoundrels, but even these circumstances are treated with a tongue-in-

cheek tone. The language and images stress adventure and romance that are more often seen during daytime soap operas than in a history book. The framing scenarios ultimately set the tone for the reading of other symbols encountered by the spectator. Here they do so through using a natural drama that emerges from historical possibility and ensuring that this places the imaginary community of Scarborough as the stage for it.

Contextualizing History for a Specific Audience

The Scarborough Faire retains higher level of affinity with actual historic events, and the original intent behind performing Renaissance festivals, as outlined in the introduction, extends to other aspects of the performance. At the Scarborough Faire, the program aids in this process. It includes extensive notes on the actual history and traditions, such as music and dance, allowing the spectator to understand what has been changed for the purpose of performance. In certain instances, the background for the heritage material is given orally during the performance, as in the case of the joust, and the Border collie or falconry exhibitions. In this respect, the audience receives a lecture, and the experience is meant to be an educational one. Furthering the Scarborough Faire's desire to entertain and educate, they have instituted a school program where students are bused in on special weekdays. "School Days is an outstanding teaching tool for educators because of the hands-on activities and learning experiences specifically geared for students of all ages" (Scarborough Faire Program 27). The focus on student involvement in learning about the history carries forward Patterson's desire for the Renaissance festival to be a cultural learning experience.

In providing an educational performance, the Scarborough Faire ostensibly opens itself up to the purposes and operations of a living history, and therefore the criticisms of those more "authentic"

performances. This is not, however, the case. The School Days program at the Scarborough Faire operates in conjunction with but separately from the main performance. By this, I mean that the education program operates on specially designated days that are not part of the regular performance schedule for the Scarborough Faire. These are usually weekdays, as opposed to the typical weekend performances, and between eight and ten thousand school children attend each day over a three-day period. During these days of operation the Scarborough Faire is only open to the schools. The volume of interest suggests a powerful medium for exposing children to history in a less traditional but more immediate and tactile way. The teachers are given a study guide with suggested activities to tie classwork to material at the festival, in addition to including a bibliography and short histories on some of the performances. This course pack, which is put together by the office staff under the direction of Bobbie Huskins, the Scarborough Faire office manager, is an ongoing process each year. According to Sevier, the festival personnel only have a minor amount of difficulty with performing during the week. In order to make the process easier, part of the site is partitioned off, and roughly two thirds of the shops do remain open and they sometimes give demonstrations of the crafts (Sevier e-mail 3/17/03).

The Scarborough Faire sends out comment cards to the teachers, and many have given feedback about the program and its usefulness in the curriculum. “They (the teachers) also use that guide . . . to prepare the children for their day. It is amazing how many come out with questions, autograph books, etc. It is kind of like a living scavenger hunt” (Sevier e-mail 3/17/03). Sevier considers this program extremely important in terms of the Scarborough Faire’s performance “mission.” “It not only exposes the children to what we do, but it allows us a chance to show history can be fun. I have people show up at my auditions now who say things like

‘I've always wanted to do this since I came on School Days ____ years ago.’ That makes it all worthwhile” (Sevier e-mail 3/17/03).

Living histories, such as what is available during the School Days program, take on several different forms and are created for different reasons. One purpose, to provide comparison between the past and the present, develops from the idea that visitors are time travelers, retaining their identity as people from a future generated by the past being presented. “[L]iving history, with its power to transport a person vicariously from one time to another, inevitably invites us to *compare historical periods* in the past with our own and to confront the fundamental questions why some things stay the same and others change” (Anderson 79). Still, comparisons can only be made with the material presented and the people portrayed. This limits the material to a slice of history and one largely dominated by a Western interpretation. In this particular case, the Scarborough Faire makes a distinct separation between the School Days performances and their regular performance schedule. Their regular performances do not have a study guide for the audience, and the material presented during the day, while remaining educational in certain respects, is no longer wholly geared toward being instructional. The impression made by this arrangement is that the purpose of a festival *can* be educational, but that the performance’s primary concerns, while not excluding instructional material, is to entertain.

The Scarborough Faire and Authenticity

The Scarborough Faire’s fictionalization of the history aids in providing the possibility for this participation. Rather than completely relying upon historically accurate material, that might require too much familiarity with the actual events, the festival introduces the permission to play with the history in its opening, offering the audience’s expectations of

the history. While this may or may not adhere to the content of a history book, what matters is the provision of experience for the spectators in addition to matching their expectations of the Renaissance. These expectations of history are usually spawned by media interpretations of the period, especially films. As a result, people have been exposed to a number of symbols and interpretations of histories and cultures around the world. This, in part, enhances the dramatic possibilities for performance, while simultaneously increasing the range of audience expectations, creating wider interest and number of satisfactory readings for a larger segment of the public. Similarly, by monopolizing on these expectations, the Scarborough Faire can not only provide a level of recognition and familiarity for the audience, but it can also provide satisfaction for the strong yearnings that these represent beyond the history.

> What are the principle traits that distinguish our present society from the society in which we immerse ourselves in thought? . . . We are free to choose from the past the period into which we wish to immerse ourselves. . . . Whereas in our present society we occupy a definite position and are subject to the constraints that go with it, memory gives us the illusion of living in the midst of groups which do not imprison us, which impose themselves on us only so far and so long as we accept them. (Halbwachs 50)

While this particular quotation refers to an individual's memory of the past, it still makes a relevant statement concerning Renaissance festivals. While freedom of choice is granted to many individuals on a daily basis, the constraints of group identity continue to define them in present society. By returning to history, people can evade these constraints by choosing a past where restrictions no longer exist or can be changed. The encouragement to romanticize history in such a way, popularized through media such as historic novels, television, and film, allows people, to a

limited extent, to choose a past they enjoy. If people dislike the past they chose, they may put down the book, turn off the television, or leave the theater. A person can leave when she wishes—a stark contrast to the rules of everyday reality.

The Renaissance festival allows individuals to wonder about what their pasts may have been like and participate in that construction. While I cannot definitively say that all audience members have this same experience, they still make choices concerning their connection to the performance. Because this performance involves history, they, at least in part, choose the way in which this history connects to their identity. Even though the history presented is generally Tudor, other pasts are in operation and often easily inserted into the Renaissance festival. The cast of the Scarborough Faire, for instance, includes the character Mistress Sachiko Oshima, a Master Mercer (a silk merchant), as well as Señor Ramirez Antonio Manuel Sanchez de la Casa Castillo, another Master Silk Merchant. These two characters represent another line of Renaissance history playing out in Japan at that time in history. Often overlooked, this history could be brought to the attention of the audience through the interaction between these two characters.

The authenticity of history is less of a concern at the festival because of the way in which history and performance relate to one another. At a traditional living history, history drives the performance and dictates the choices made in the presentation. At the Renaissance festival, the performance drives the history and the choices made under these circumstances serve the performance and the audience rather than the history. The Renaissance festival presents the multiplicity of the Renaissance. The performance does not necessarily have to restrict itself to any particular interpretation of the Renaissance. Even though it takes a specific slice of history, it often splices other pieces of history and events

into the performance. This does not, however, make what is presented any less authentic for the audience. “Performance offers a new authenticity, based on body knowledge, on what audiences and performers share together, on what they mutually construct” (Jones 14). For those who choose not to participate and to remain aloof do not necessarily have an authentic experience of what the festival has to offer. They remain tourists in a very removed and pure sense. They are there to see the sights and not necessarily to experience them. “As a form of cultural exchange, performance ethnography encourages everyone present to feel themselves as both familiar and strange, to see the truths and the gaps in their cross cultural embodiments. In this exchange, we find an authenticity that is intuitive, body-centered, and richly ambivalent” (Jones 14). People get a chance to play other aspects of themselves. Are these identities more authentic? Who really knows? They are nonetheless true aspects of the individual so one could say that the environment of the Renaissance festival offers a way to examine not an authenticity of history but an authenticity of self and the relation that it has with perceptions of the past.

Reading Community within Renaissance Festivals

Though there are many possible readings of the history and the community being portrayed at the Scarborough Faire and other Renaissance festivals, this does not mean that a large number of people cannot agree upon a reading for a particular symbol or boundary. “Symbols . . . do more than merely stand for or represent something else. . . . They also allow those who employ them to supply part of their meaning” (Cohen 14). Each person will have their own experience and knowledge to add to the interpretation of the symbol, making it theirs. People understand categories, such as doctor, mother, father, and can

generally agree upon them. Their specific readings, however, will be tinted by personal experience.

> [A] range of meanings can be glossed over in a commonly accepted symbol—precisely because it allows its adherents to attach their own meanings to it. They share the symbol, but so not necessarily share its meanings. Community is just such a boundary-expressing symbol. As a symbol, it is held in common by its members; but its meaning varies with its members' unique orientations to it. (Cohen 15)

What helps to solidify community in any instance is a shared understanding of the boundaries producing that community, although people will not always be conscious of what these boundaries are. Were you to walk up to an individual at any point—not just at the festival—they would not necessarily be able to point out the specific boundaries of their current community. They would know, however, that they occupy a community in some form even if they cannot readily define it. They will certainly believe that they and others of their community will share "a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and further, that they think that sense may differ from one made elsewhere" (Cohen 16). Just as this is applicable to local and national understandings of community, it also applies to the Renaissance festival. Within the performance, the communities can be broken down into a generalization of those who merely wish to observe the performance and those who actively participate.

A general understanding of community might argue that communities of people remain distinct with little crossing over. On the surface, one could maintain that people do not share in communities other than their own, but this is not necessarily the case. "[P]eople of radically opposed views can find their own meanings in what nevertheless remain

common symbols" (Cohen 18). The more abstract the symbol the more readily this occurs. Love, peace, justice, freedom—all of these are filled with contradictory ways of viewing the concept, and yet they are capable of encompassing all of the interpretations. History is also abstract. The Renaissance in particular, with its vague starting date and many smaller Renaissances occurring in tandem with one another, is just as abstract in many ways. Such a view makes it plain that a symbolic approach to community can be more fluid than many may understand.

The Renaissance festival has utilized the past to create a particular community based on the general symbols associated with the period in order to evoke the history for the largest number of people possible. The creators of the Renaissance festival have built an alternative reality for our own amusement. Rather than offer events such as scenes of disjointed historical events, they offer the audience symbols within the unified atmosphere of a community created from symbols of the history. Instead of specifying particular events of the Renaissance, these symbols evoke the past for an audience who might not necessarily be familiar with the events. As explained in Chapter One, the fact that symbols are imprecise allows them to be a highly effective way to build a common language for community, and performance can be viewed as this common language.

The interactive acting and interpersonal exchange at the Scarborough Faire helps to bridge the boundary between the acting community and the community of the audience by inviting spectators to become actors. In doing so, the actors at the festival are encouraging what Victor Turner has called *communitas*. Spectators have made a pilgrimage of sorts; one where they can identify with one another, essentially removing for a time identities and communities that would otherwise divide members of the pilgrimage. In this sense the pilgrimage is a real one. Audience members had to travel to get to this performance and pass

through a gate into a different “reality” not unlike the pilgrimage or the ritual where real time and place are suspended for the duration of the activity. Festival as a performance has the power to strip away divisive material from the audience and meld them into a community of their own albeit a temporary one.

This new community is a transitory one where the individual may stay, leave for the real world they left behind, or cross into the imagined community of the performers through taking on a new identity within the community. Crossing between communities results in an observable behavior which can be utilized by the actors in assisting spectators to participate. Cohen notes that “people not only mark a boundary between their community and others, but also reverse or invert the norms of behavior and values which ‘normally’ mark their own boundaries” (58). Such a reversal can reassert and validate the normal when seen in contrast with the reversal, but it can also reject the norm and set up another in its stead (Cohen 63). The inversion of the norms for behavior allows people to experiment with aspects of their identities in addition to how they might interact with others. The actors assist in building a feeling of camaraderie between spectators that does not necessarily exist in the communities they usually occupy. The interactive use of improvisation aids in setting up and reading the historical symbols in such a way to promote the sense of community.

Building Community through Interaction

The way in which festivals advocate the use of history and performance creates identity-play that in turn fosters a sense of community. Not only do the actors at a particular festival share community, but also Renaissance festivals in the United States reveal a larger sense of community. Many of the actors know one another from

working at several different fairs, and the casts of various festivals will accord the outside actor a certain place within their community. While conducting research at the Scarborough Faire, the actors comported themselves professionally, answering my questions but remaining in character at all times. They opened up to the questioning, but the relationship between me as scholar and the actors as subjects lent a formality to the interviews. Once the director, Coy Seviere, escorted me to the backstage areas and introduced me as having worked for a number of years at the MRF, the actors opened up to accept me as an equal, offering information more freely and candidly than they had previously.

Audience members may also find access to this community through their own participation. Some audience members simply come to watch the performances, while others will play along with the actors by taking on a persona. Other people choose to come in full costume several times in the course of a season. These individuals share a place and identity within the village as much as the actors do. They insert themselves into the narrative of the performance with ease, often having been to a specific festival many times. Performance, in this instance, has aided in the building of a community within the precincts of the Renaissance festival, for both actors and audience members. These spectators, sometimes referred to as “participatrons,” do not require the aid of the actor in reading themselves into the community. They are capable of interpreting the new communal boundaries without any assistance.

The greater use and understanding of the history, in addition to the smaller festival size, also allows the various street characters at the Scarborough Faire to have more interaction with the audience members. Actors sometimes use overt spectator activities to aid in initiating interaction. My activities of taking research notes and photographs provided a cue for one actor. The actor approaching me began the

conversation by asking what my equipment was and why I had such an interest in the village. Explaining that I was conducting research, at this point he assigned me, against historical norms, the identity of a visiting scholar from one of the European universities. The other actors, taking a cue from the initial actor, began addressing me as a scholar. The actors and I understood the symbol of the scholar within the larger frame of the Renaissance, and we mutually used this in such a way as to insert my identity into the community. This symbol would not have necessarily worked with another spectator. If that had been the case, then the actor would have chosen another symbol (merchant, farmer, et cetera) to "read" the individual into the community.

For the most part, an actor's approach to engaging the spectator in identity play is highly organic and idiosyncratic to the actor. Engaging the audience or assigning identity based on some activity or article of clothing is fairly typical since it is the easiest method for both the actor and the spectator. It leaves the situation open for both parties to confirm or deny a particular identity without feeling threatened. I have often used a similar approach in some situations while working at the MRF. These techniques and others are usually learned at the entertainment workshops and rehearsals prior to the opening of the festival. Most Renaissance festivals offer these in order to prepare more traditionally trained actors, as well as amateurs, for the demands of the performance environment. The workshops also have the added benefit of allowing the cast to get to know one another, as well as the characters they are about to play.

This sequence of drawing spectators into the action by recognizing them as a persona should be the ideal experience, one where the actors and spectators mutually confirm the reality created at the festival by actively participating with one another on a one-on-one basis. The recognition of a persona does not hinge upon creating one, since the visitor may choose

whether or not to participate in identity-play. But the experience and contact made by the actor affirms that they have status, in some capacity, as visitors. This happens to a greater or lesser degree at all Renaissance festivals based on the attention and training of the actors and the desire of the spectator to join the experience of the community.

But even in the act of including the spectator, there must be at least some sense of separation between the actor and the audience to both facilitate play and make it safe. At the Scarborough Faire, and other Renaissance festivals as well, physical symbols separate the community of performers from the community of tourists. The visitor, upon entering the Scarborough Faire, receives a broadsheet separate from the larger program, containing a basic performance schedule, menus for the food areas, a list of craft booths, and a map. It also states that visitors can tell company members from the general audience by a specific medallion worn upon the costumes. This device changes in design from year to year to prevent unauthorized copies. For the most part, the differentiation is for the safety of the spectators and the performers. Many people come to festivals dressed in costume and some present themselves as members of the resident company. Usually, they do so to perform shows or music without permission from the director in order to receive money from the crowd.

Differentiating between performers and audience becomes even more important in terms of identity play. One must be able to tell who is official and who is not, and the costuming and the interaction make this difficult to determine. Audience members may only feel comfortable and safe when interacting with an official member of the company. This did not appear to be a large concern the day I visited the Scarborough Faire. The smaller and more personal interactions with the cast made such differentiation less necessary. While the Scarborough Faire is a smaller

festival where the acting community is close knit, some festivals, like the TRF, become so large that it becomes impossible for all the actors to know one another. They, especially, need to know who belongs to the company in the event of an emergency situation. Is it a real situation, or is someone playing?

To increase communication between the actors, and to ensure that they know the difference between a scenario and a real situation, code words are used. Most Renaissance festivals, including the MRF, use a sentence beginning with the words "In sooth . . ." This phrase signals to other actors that what is to follow is truth and not part of a script or improvisation. During a joust many years ago at the MRF, a knight was seriously injured, but it looked as if it were scripted. Members of the royal court, familiar with the joust knew it was not. Using this phrase kept the crowd calm and allowed the actors to get help as quickly as possible. By differentiating at a small level, the safety of interaction can be ensured for everyone in the community.

Choosing Community

Why do individuals choose to enter into the community of the Renaissance festival? Some experts point to an affinity with a particular past for certain people and a desire, on their part, to live out what they feel is lacking in their own lives, which some describe as "romance" or "adventure." Chapter One explored Eco's thoughts on the reasons for the popular resurgence of interest in the Middle Ages. In seeking to explain this phenomenon, he believes that it centers upon a search for roots. In reality, this period of history has been a central node for fantasy since the nineteenth-century, insinuating itself into popular literature and art. The Scarborough Faire also operates as a part of popular culture, especially in terms of the type of history and its method of presentation. "Popular

cultural capital is an accumulation of meanings and pleasures that serves the interest of the subordinated and powerless, or rather the disempowered, for few social groups are utterly without power" (Fiske 18). Conventional living histories may hold an accumulation of meanings and pleasures that serve to help explore or support individual or group identity, but they do so to the exclusion of others in order to support a cemented hegemonic identity. Further, the pleasure "results from a particular relationship between meanings and power. Pleasure for the subordinate is produced by the assertion of one's social identity in resistance to, in independence of, or in negation with, the structure of domination" (Fiske 19). Pleasure comes from playing with the identity that society or your social group gives to you. Within the Renaissance festival, subordinates through identity-play, have the possibility to change for themselves what the dominant view pinpoints as their "normal" identity.

Conflicts can result from this, especially if the hosting community views festival participants as social subordinates instead of equals. While those members of the outer community may look askance at the individuals who work at the Scarborough Faire, most of the street actors come from Waxahachie or the Dallas-Fort Worth area. A large number of the individuals work in the computer industry as programmers or support personnel, or are students at local colleges and universities. While each member of these groups has his or her own, personal, reasons for participating in the performance, "[o]ften people come into community drama not just for recreation but to positively leave behind their isolation. They want to bond with others and share experiences" (Johnston 6). Many of the actors maintain regular jobs that do not necessarily require direct, face-to-face interaction with other individuals. The Renaissance festival, in contrast, provides direct interaction. Further, the creation of an identity

facilitates the interaction with others by granting a sense of anonymity that can be used to generate confidence, especially when involving spectators in the action. The audience may never be aware of these experiences because they interact with the characters created by these people.

Taking on other identities, however, often places the actor at the center of suspicion, especially for those in the mainstream of the community. The usual perception associated with Renaissance festivals is that the performance draws hippies, new age advocates, petty criminals, and drug addicts. According to Sevier, the community of Waxahachie continues to look askance at the people involved with the Scarborough Faire, even though he has explained the economic benefits to the merchants. Waxahachie receives a solid economic boost not only from the audience the fair draws to the area, but also from the actors and craftspeople working there. But what might surprise the local community the most is how normal the resident cast happens to be. Once behind the scenes, the individual could meet a unexpected number of local community members. For example, Queen Anne Boleyn is played by Shannon Bradley, who works as a safety inspector for the Dallas Fire Department. Chris Arterburn plays the gypsy fiddler Milosh Borodin at the Scarborough Faire. During the week, Arterburn works for IBM in Dallas as a systems engineer. Even if cast members are not a part of the local community, the odd characters, heavy beards and scraggly hair, often part of the costume, could easily lead to assumptions. While David Ballard, a puppeteer at the Scarborough Faire and many other Renaissance festivals, looks and sounds a bit like an itinerant hippie, he holds a degree from the College of William and Mary and has worked with the Smithsonian Institution on puppets and puppetry.

So, what happens when someone is a member of a community yet needs to express a different identity than that allowed by the community?

What happens if a multitude of communities inform your identity? “Identities are not neutral. Behind the quest for identity are different and, often, conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire” (Weeks 89). In exploring self, at times, we come up against our own communities. As members, we may be proud to belong to a group but still feel a need to express difference. How can individuals do so within the group and not compromise membership standing? How the group views the individual is just as important as how the individual represents the group to others. The Renaissance festival offers a place where one can confirm, deny, or subvert these identities without compromising the group. Fantasy allows this to happen because play is not viewed as a serious activity. What can be done in performance cannot always be done in public. Doing so carries the impression of permanence and could be considered a threat.

Interactive Acting and Building Community and Identity

The interactive nature of the performance and the reliance upon improvisation allows community and identity to be built in an organic fashion. Through this performance medium, the actors can help to organize the interpretation of the symbols that create the community in such a way to make everyone feel included. Gary Izzo sees the goal of interactive theatre as empowerment. The power of improvisation lies in its inclusiveness, and the actors at the Scarborough Faire utilize improvisation to make performances more personal. For instance, some spectators at the Scarborough Faire have the pleasure of meeting and witnessing the performance of a *commedia dell’ arte* troupe. The actors begin by announcing a show to gather a crowd. Because their performance is not scheduled on a stage, this process can become quite challenging. Instead of standing near the performance site and yelling, the actors go out

into the street and meet potential audience members. One actor had already approached me at the front gate, assigning me the role of Renaissance scholar. He caught sight of me and importuned, “Professore, please come to see us now. You will lend dignity to the performance.” They greeted other visitors as noble guests and “humbly begged” their attendance at their performance. Once in conversation, they physically steer the individual toward the seating area loudly announcing that the individual is their especial guest. The actors make a great show of seating the spectator in the “perfect spot,” and keep this intimacy during the performance by flirting and drawing them into the action. The lavish attention of the actors makes each person feel important and valuable. The spectators sit straighter and react, usually laughing, when the actors address them. The *commedia* group gives the audience a feeling validity by asking them to participate and a sense of importance by displaying a genuine desire for their company.

Once spectators enter the Scarborough Faire, they cannot escape the performance by walking away; instead, they are enfolded into the community. Because of the immersive nature of the performance, spectators become a part of it even if they do not choose to be an active participant. Everyone coming through the front gate automatically becomes a community member in some respect. Even the passive spectator can be viewed as part of the tourist community. They have traveled to a specific place in order to view or experience some event or culture without much discomfort for themselves. Some do, however, react more openly and publicly to the characters and other visitors. In so doing, those spectators begin to become members of the larger fantasy community. The actors will then sometimes feel more inclined, given the positive participation of the spectator, to treat them as more intimate members of the temporal community created by the village. In my case, as

the day went on, I became known among more of the acting community. Certainly this feeling increased once the actors understood that I, too, had worked at a Renaissance festival. The new familiarity gave me the feeling of being a member of the community returning from some university in Padua—a hometown daughter returning as a big city success.

Building any sense of community within the Scarborough Faire, as with any Renaissance festival, requires interaction between performer and audience member. Improvisation guides this interaction between the two groups and builds the sense of community. In order to achieve a facility in interactive improvisation, the actors must form a cohesive community for the performance, and this comes from several factors. The number of actors is in keeping with the overall size of the festival environment. This gives a greater feeling of a village, as opposed to a performance or theme park. Among the actors and craftspeople, age and gender vary a great deal. Similarly, actors represent not only English and other Western European characters, but also the gypsies, Spanish, and Japanese. Of course, the characters cast can vary from year to year and will depend upon the people who choose to audition, but the diversity of people within the village environment furthers the impression of an organic place.

What especially marks the resident company is the actors' steadfast commitment to training as evidenced in a small article within the program. First, it acts to inform the audience of the high level of professionalism, possibly alleviating community animosity. Second, it illustrates the intimacy between the actors in their knowledge of the company members and characters. The familiarity of character and historical situation helps makes improvisation much easier. When the improvisation looks effortless, the fantasy community becomes stronger and more easily inserts spectators into the narrative. Though the situations of the scenarios may change from year to year, they continue to involve

some familiar characters, helping to sustain community among the actors. When actors can sustain a comfortable community amongst themselves, the extension of identity play to the audience not only becomes easier for the actor to initiate, but also easier for the spectator to respond in kind.

While some people actively seek out connections to the history on both cultural and personal terms, others are not necessarily as self motivating. They may not understand what to do, or they may lack the self confidence to seek more active roles and identities within the narrative frame. For these individuals, the actors provide potential identities and behavioral guidelines and "answer critical questions about 'what to do? How to act? Who to be?" (Baker 15). People go through this everyday in each life situation. Based on past experience and social knowledge, individuals manage to negotiate most situations—they know how to improvise.

How situations are navigated by an individual is no different. The actors, in ideal circumstances, are supposed to help the spectator learn to answer these questions within the performance environment. As Jeff Wirth notes in Interactive Acting, the idea is to make the improvisational experience one that can be mastered by the spectator almost immediately. The actor workshops serve to help actors begin to master these techniques and apply them to the audience. The most important ability to learn is that of backleading.[6] Backleading is a series of improvisational techniques meant to help lead the spectator through a scene. The reason behind this is to help the person to gain confidence in a performative situation. Wirth notes that as the spectator feels successful she gains confidence and can make a larger contribution to the scenario in which they participate. "The purpose of backleading is to free spectators to contribute to the narrative on their own initiative" (Wirth 103). This initially entices the audience member into playing by cueing them and giving them endowments (giving

them specific information to work with). The process is complex and requires actors comfortable with improvisation and extremely quick on their performative feet in order for the process to feel effortless.

Actors are also trained to recognize good marks, potential candidates for playing, as well as bad ones in a given situation. For example, families usually make a good mark. They comprise a group and feel safe, making them more likely to play. People who exhibit too much rowdiness or look visibly inebriated are obviously a bad choice for play, especially for beginning actors. With experience, actors learn to read subtle cues in body language and verbal tone from a distance, and with this information they can determine the best method for approaching a person or group of people.

During my last year at the MRF, I played the character Isabella Borgia. With two other women from Michigan State University, we created the Borgia sisters. When wandering the village with the royal court, we would look for likely audience members to engage in a scenario. The name Borgia, looked at in terms of its myth, suggests poison and extra husbands to most people. Using this knowledge as a base, we would approach much older men or their wives, treating them as wealthy foreigners. If the woman seemed more approachable, we might suggest that she could manage her own properties by getting rid of the husband. One of my colleagues would engage the woman in conversation, quizzing her about how obviously her husband was rich, while I would question the man as to whether he liked red or white wine or if he preferred mushrooms in his salad. Always keeping the tone light, we would confirm the answers of the person and encourage additions to be made.[7] The gist is that the actor allows the spectators to answer these questions in any way they wish and not just based on current norms for the individual, inspiring an exploration on the part of the spectator. Including other members of the

crowd in the scene also encourages participation through validating those who choose to do so.

While the Scarborough Faire allows individuals the freedom to play with various identities, this does not mean that there is no understanding of how to do so. Some sort of framework must remain in place to ensure interaction, consistency, and safety. The simplest method for doing so is to rely upon a common understanding of myth and symbol within a given context. While seemingly restrictive in terms of history, such reliance merely acts as a basis upon which individuals can "riff"—much like a jazz improvisation. The use of the Renaissance gives a relatively common framework, one which can rapidly expand to include even earlier or slightly later historical periods.

Fabricating Identity

The Scarborough Faire offers a safe environment to explore identity because the community created here accepts and validates this exploration. Although the community of actors can offer characters to spectators, the individual audience members sometimes do not readily take on new identities. What the Scarborough Faire openly tenders to the spectators, however, is the opportunity to join the community as an actor. "If you love the magic of Scarborough Faire®, join the Performing Company and be a part of it" (17). The ability to actively participate in the Renaissance festival gives agency to those who seek it. This agency exists for any spectator or actor, but it is not the focused or sole purpose of the performance. "[T]he power of play involves the power to play with the boundary between the representation and the real, to insert oneself into the process of representation so that one is not subjected by it, but, conversely, is empowered by it" (Fiske 236). At the Renaissance festival, one can manipulate the line between the real world and the performance as they

will. The community that results is empowering in that we can represent ourselves as we see our own identity or as we wish for others to view us.

Renaissance festivals, like the Scarborough Faire, can allow people to experiment with who they are, or wish to be, by constructing single or multiple identities based on the history being displayed. I say single or multiple identities, because any person in the audience can create an identity at will. Sometimes, as an actor at the MRF, I found myself wishing that I could be a sassy wench or a pirate queen, even as I portrayed the courtly Isabella Borgia. All of these, to me, constitute aspects of who I am, and audience members are free to express any number of identities in ways that the actors, who must play their characters, cannot. Many individuals, audience and actors alike, find connections to the past through familiar characters in books and films or through their own suppositions about their family origins. People may build their identities backwards from who they are now to who they might have been then. Some, however, do not have substantial connections to a past. Without a concrete link to an actual past, people are forced to create new identities through other pasts (Lowenthal, Past 41-42). Lacking a past, individuals will likely fabricate one or forge a connection with another, granting a prestigious identity or group membership. “The more ancient a lineage the more highly venerated it is. The length that glorifies genealogies also aggrandizes group prestige and privilege” (Lowenthal, Heritage 176). In some instances, individuals might like to believe that their roots go back to some romantic golden age granting them inclusion in an elite community.

The Renaissance festival actually allows for a fantasized connection to a romantic past, regardless of an individual’s actual past or familial decent. A prime example can be found in the inclusion of the Scottish past at many Renaissance festivals. The Scarborough Faire

includes Scotland in its opening scenario and creates a niche for individuals who wish to affiliate themselves with this specific past. The program reads,

> Wanted. Freeman of all Clans for service in the Scottish Fencibles. Enlistments daily. The regiment is a volunteer group that was raised six years ago by Captain Scott Gordon. Drills and demonstrations show the everyday life of a foot soldier in 1533. *Open to anyone in highland or lowland costume that would like to participate*. . . . Live the Dream! [emphasis mine] (39)

Captain Gordon and the other individuals who associate themselves with the Scottish traditions and history, regardless of actual nationalities, find a community for themselves within this history. The stress above is on clan and group, and the two are distinctive in that they recognize symbols associated with the Scottish past. People who share this reading are invited to make their own clan within the Scarborough Faire.

Audience members know that they may participate through open invitations like this. Many also have a tacit understanding that, at Renaissance festivals, audience members are encouraged to participate. Those who do not possess this understanding can observe other audience members joining in, signaling that such participation is sanctioned. While the Scottish characters could be seen at a number of festivals, the popularity of the film Braveheart raised the number of people dressing in the highland tradition immensely; it became something familiar in popular consciousness. Specifically, the film raised mainstream recognition of Scottish history and personas, granting it a courageous prestige. The Scarborough Faire, and many other festivals, takes advantage of popular culture to encourage participation and play. Such a practice associates them with the sentiment of the film and with other popular conceptions of the highlander.

In creating an identity, like a highlander, often the content and quality of the self, or the character, takes a lesser level of importance as compared to creating one (Dowd 258). This is especially true when applied to the untrained spectator. If a spectator wishes to participate, the individual will sometimes attempt to fit in with the festival community. While the participation at the Scarborough Faire is facilitated by interaction with the actors, in instances where interactive performance breaks down or is difficult, commercial transactions can replace interpersonal interaction as the main mode of performing the history. Usually, this is done with clothing or the outward appearances of a character as opposed to the creation of a character from inner choices. With this in mind, the various shops would make this process a little easier. The first step, construction, takes the spectator no time at all. Some spectators at the Scarborough Faire did not feel the need to create a self. This is not unusual. They, perhaps, felt a need to hang on to their present identity, validating and asserting it. Others, however, do feel compelled to create a new identity.

At the Scarborough Faire, a majority of the possible identities for the spectator focus on characters occupying the middle and upper classes. Most, though not all, of the characters portrayed by the cast are as well. The fact that the history being presented is the Renaissance does require some semblance of class. The way in which this is presented, however, does not carry the same emphasis that would have been evident during the time period. Most of the actors at the Scarborough Faire play characters that fall somewhere between the members of the royal court and the merchant class. Because the next largest group of people intentionally playing characters comprises all of the craftspeople, commerce takes a central position. As for the audience, the other actors generally address them politely, as “Lord” or “Lady,” ascribing them a particular level of

power. Impetus for these various identity choices depends upon the items available for sale. What the Renaissance festival can represent is an identity based upon commerce—the acquisition or dispensing of identity.

The Scarborough Faire, however, does have lower class citizens and beggars, but their representation remains in keeping with the demands of a tourist community. Take as an example, Scab, the beggar at the Eagle's Crossing Bridge. As described in the introduction, this actor portrays a fairly non-threatening beggar. He does not speak, but non-verbally cajoles the spectator into interaction by using humor. The audience does not in any way feel compelled to give him money. Once someone does, however, his expertise in hitting himself in the head with the pan, sudden and odd as it is, compels a strange sense of intimate interaction—as if the person is now in on the joke. Such interaction is aided by the clean appearance of the character. The dirt is arranged to be aesthetic, like make-up. He seems to represent what many people, especially tourists, wish the homeless were really like—healthy, amusing, and non-threatening.

While some of the actors choose to portray peasants at the Scarborough Faire, having examined types of props available for identity construction and the treatment of the average visitor, the merchant and upper classes receive the largest consideration and marketing. Many of the craft shops sell items for spectators to purchase in order to "fit in" with the village community. Clothing, shoes, mugs, most of the items have use only to someone playing or creating a character for the community. Few of these items would be considered for use outside of the Scarborough Faire. Because of the prevalence of commerce, identity may be purchased, created off the rack, rather than historically or interpersonally assigned. The costuming available to the spectator avoids the depiction of beggars and members of the lower classes. Most of the merchandise the crafters

sell offers an individual at least a middle class position within the village as a community, but these offerings can readily span the upper classes as well due to the type of rich materials of which they are made. The average audience member would likely associate the heavy brocades or velvets with the upper classes even if the cut, design, or color were actually reserved for the middle classes. All that matters is the fulfillment of the spectator's expectations for the identity they wish to create. While the tendency on the part of the Scarborough Faire is to represent the audience as middle or upper class—after all they are considered guests—that is not to say that romanticized versions of the peasant are not offered, but the items for sale present an image, like the beggar, of what people would like the peasant to have been. The peasant garb sold by the shops is frilly, gauzy, and clean. The aesthetic is one that embraces the romanticizing of the peasant. Soft pastel colors and lace comprise the "lower class" look. In addition, the other commodities sold also adhere to a certain romantic notion of what an item, like a cup, might have looked like during the Renaissance.

Even with all the choices available to the audience member at the Scarborough Faire, what any one individual chooses to be, do, or represent cannot be stated with any absolute certainty. Whether or not the audience members at the Scarborough Faire exerted a particular political stance while playing or only enjoyed the fantasy situation cannot easily be asserted. "While texts construct subject positions it does not follow that all women or men take up that which is offered . . ." (Baker 107). This is true of any text. Even at the other living history venues, the audience has no obligation to take up the identities that are offered. But the key in that particular circumstance is that alternatives are not available. Other choices are omitted and the impression may be that they either never existed or were unimportant. Other representations may just simply have not existed

from a historical and cultural standpoint, making it all the more difficult to understand where and how the individual fits into the community being performed. The Renaissance festival text offers a great deal of flexibility and choice in representation, allowing the spectator to take up or ignore aspects of the performance of this particular history.

Playing Out New Identities

If, as Chapter One outlined, the individual ascribes varying levels of importance to a group and this level of importance influences identity, then what happens when the group disappears or no longer holds influence over the individual? Should the individual remove him or herself from identification with a group, something different may happen.

> The sociologist may locate the source of the real self in social roles, primary among which are the occupational or familial roles . . . whereas the individual subject may feel his real self shining through only when all role requirements are lifted, which is to say, when he or she is alone. (Dowd 251)

While individuals at the Renaissance festival are never actually alone, they are largely among strangers. Such circumstances can lead to two different reactions. First, the group of strangers may inhibit the behavior of the individual, in which case the spectator will cling to and rely upon asserting a current identity. As I observed at the opening of the Scarborough Faire, some audience members either ignored the actors who approached them entirely or denied the interaction by not accepting the role being offered. They did so by not accepting the actors as their characters and asking them questions concerning their schooling and jobs during the week.

The second type of audience reaction frees individuals *because* they are among strangers. In this second possibility, spectators may feel freer to experiment with identity precisely because they do not know

anyone. I felt awkward, at first, about being referred to as “Doctor” and “Professor” while at the Scarborough Faire. To me, these titles are reserved for a relatively elite group of people, and while I was working toward the right to be called by these titles, I had not yet attained them. At the beginning, I tried to moderate the role assigned to me, explaining to the actors that I was not yet a doctor. They persisted, and I spent some time nervously looking around to see if anyone would come forward and take me to task for taking on the title without having completed my doctoral program. Since no one appeared to do so, I began to relax and enjoy my new persona—even introducing myself to the actors as my character. Even if someone had materialized to point a finger and shout impostor, any change or experimentation in identity would not necessarily be taken seriously since it would be considered play. A great deal of freedom exists in such a situation, and an opportunity to step away from the roles assigned culturally, socially, and historically without permanent consequence presents itself. Such a freedom is not granted at other living histories. They must represent the individual historically both because of their mission to present reasonably accurate history in addition to inculcate and reaffirm membership within the heritage community.

Other scholars in the area of self and identity have stated that the conception of the self and its construction must go against what is historically presented. “Selfhood must apparently be conceived in opposition to the world as historical, which seems suffocating, even bound up with authority and domination” (Roberts 120). Even as history, as it is often presented, does culturally determine both the self and role within the community, some individuals rebel against the categorization of themselves into that community. Such a categorization, correct or not, could be viewed as a form of oppression or disempowerment. From the perspective of gender and ethnicity, more traditional historical sites offer

that authority and domination. Although the Renaissance festival presents an historical viewpoint, the romantic presentation coupled with the distinct sense of mythic construction diffuses the historical determination for the individual. Gender and ethnicity can be confirmed or subverted as the individual chooses. In either case, the Renaissance festival environment gives a safe area in which to do it.

Because the Renaissance festival remains relatively neutral and offers a safe place to play with identity, it also offers a way to escape or subvert stereotypes by manipulating historical perceptions. Individuals can re-read the historical symbols or stereotypes presented based on their own interpretation and experience. Within the scope of the tournament field, and the Renaissance in general, women are perceived to have no role other than the stereotype of the maiden or the wench. The Scarborough Faire's joust, however, changes this. The role of the maiden is upended by the female squire, who assists one of the knights on the field. The woman taps into an historic set of traditions and symbols—ones that typically excluded women. Even as she taps into these resources, she at the same time asserts identity through this difference—she is a *female* warrior. The symbol of knight or pirate as read by the actors at the Scarborough Faire illustrate for the spectator that women may tap into that symbol and create a identity of their own.

Conclusion

Initially, the idea behind the first Renaissance festivals sought to immerse the spectator in the environment in order to experience the history and culture of the Renaissance, and it is the act of seeking out experience beyond the everyday that also marks the visitor as a tourist. The Renaissance festival may not necessarily strike the average viewer as a traditional tourist site. The performance of a village during the

Renaissance, however, marks it as not only a place to obtain experience different from everyday life, but also as a place to observe others behaving in a manner unlike that of the present. Separating the behavior in terms environment can license an exploration of identity not normally sanctioned by the group in everyday life.

In forming symbolic communities within the Scarborough Faire, interactive acting plays a role in the reading of the historical symbols presented. Even symbols already manifest in or on the person of the spectator come to be read within the historical context occupied by the actors. Improvisational play has the ability to rearrange and re-read these symbols thereby reassigning community and identity for audience members who wish to participate. This process of exchange between actor and spectator provides a template for other observers to choose community within the festival. In addition, the performance also serves as an example for identity play, illustrating for spectators the types of identities possible and how to begin to form them. The interactions give the audience the building blocks for creating play on their own which offers them the ability to change, temporarily, community and identity as well.

While the Scarborough Faire provides an example of how community and identity can be built through personal performances and involvement, other Renaissance festivals must rely upon different methods. Not all festivals have the advantage of a large resident cast to cover a moderately sized performance site. Such a situation makes interaction with the audience easy and unavoidable for the actors of the resident cast. Other Renaissance festivals, however, may occupy a site two to three times larger and face the difficulty of providing an immersive environment that can build not only a sense of community, but also offer opportunities for the visitor to play with identity. Without enough actors to

accomplish this in an interactive and interpersonal manner, the performance and the community it builds must rely upon another aspect of the Renaissance festival—commerce and commodification of history.

Endnotes

[1] "Festival" and "faire" are often used interchangeably when referring to Renaissance festivals. The terms encompass both the physical entity and its performance. Often people will also use the term "Renfest" or "Renfaire" especially if they are performers or staff. Another idiom, used by festival performers and staff, is "Rennies," an insider term referring to people who work at the festivals on a regular basis.

[2] The particular performance I witnessed took place May 20, 2001.

[3] Sevier, like some festival directors, has extensive professional theatre experience and education. He has received degrees in theatre, music, and communications in addition to a graduate degree in marketing. In addition, Sevier earned a certificate in Amusement Facility Management from the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions. He also has twenty-five years of experience as a street character at various Renaissance festivals.

[4] At present these actors are: Thom Barrows, Shannon Bradley, Janna Casstevens, Daniel Granquist, Michelle Gross, Ellen Horr, Douglas Jacobs, Bill McCurry, Ginger Mensik, Rex Milner, Caryl Morris, Roxanne Murray, Richard Patterson, Daniel Penz, Ronn Robinson, and Susan Von Rudolph.

[5] Henry VII, first of the Tudor dynasty, defeated Richard III and claimed the throne in 1485. Much of his reign was spent in securing the monarchy against other claimants. His marriage to Elizabeth York did much to legitimize his claim, but other Yorkists and members of the Lancaster line posed a serious threat. His reaction was to pass several writs of attainder proclaiming those individuals traitors. Henry VIII's inability to produce a male heir during his first two marriages continued to represent a threat to the Tudor throne.

[6] Wirth utilized this term which originated with ballroom dancing. As he explains, “Many men on the dance floor couldn’t lead their partner out of a paper bag, but you’d never know it. . . . [The women] have mastered the art of appearing to follow the gentleman’s lead, which they themselves are, in fact, providing” (103).

[7] The technique would begin with the simplest improvisation technique, such as “Yes, and . . .” where the actor confirms and adds information helping to build the scene. If the person seemed comfortable with that, other techniques, based on past experience with audience members, would be utilized to help the person continue to participate. While the rules of improvisation are involved, the process is extremely individual and organic making apprenticing and experience necessary.

Chapter Three

Off-the-Rack History and Ready-to-Wear Identity: Commerce as Community at the Texas Renaissance Festival

Introduction

When I walked through the front gate of the Scarborough Faire, a pleasant garden-like setting greeted me. Musicians played nearby and small stone benches ringed some small trees and flowers. There was no rush or bustle, no hurry to get into the performance, and the people at the gate took the time to greet me and welcome me informally to the village. The entry into the Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF) was another matter. The walls of the TRF are easily twenty to thirty feet high and look like solid stone. Where the gates of the Scarborough Faire are wide and inviting, the TRF has narrow doorways. The Beefeaters guarding the gates remain formal as they take tickets, and because of the number of spectators, the impetus upon entering is to get out of the way as soon as possible. Once inside the performance space opens into a huge panorama of lanes and shops. Rather than feeling at home, I felt daunted by the sheer size of the space and the bustle of everyone in it.

While the Scarborough Faire makes the most of its smaller size and interpersonal interaction to create a sense of community for the audience, not all Renaissance festivals have that luxury. Some, like the TRF, have expanded into a performance equivalent of urban sprawl, becoming so large that the actors are easily outnumbered by the audience. As one of the largest and a direct descendant of the first Renaissance festivals, the TRF offers another way of looking at both community and identity within this type of performance. With size comes a level of difficulty in creating interpersonal interaction and a sense of community in performance. The TRF cannot exclusively rely upon the actors to build

community and reinforce identity among the spectators. Instead, it utilizes the tangible symbols of the Renaissance, both historical and imagined, to create a space where commerce can build and drive community and identity through commercial rather than interpersonal exchange. That is not to say that interaction is no longer a concern or an important part of the performance. Rather, the larger festival necessitates another way to encompass and involve the audience. Commodifying history can be a viable option.

When a Renaissance festival becomes as large as the TRF, the environment and its ability to evoke the history and promote play becomes more important than that of the actors. The opening scenario, involving Henry VIII, roots the performance space historically through the names of the characters, but the audience may not see anything other than that particular scenario, some extra scenes, and a few scheduled shows. Some visitors may only view the joust, and this performance in the environment is enough to concretize the history and engage the spectator in play due to its singular ability to symbolize and embody an entire historical period, and the crowd interactions while cheering on the knights. During my visits to the TRF[1], no actor approached me or attempted to interact. As a result, the sense of community shifted away from a focus on being a member of a specific group or assigned a particular role. Instead, I was only a tourist in the largest sense, and my community included other tourists at the TRF. For me, history was evoked through goods symbolic of the period rather than the language and mannerisms of the village inhabitants, and my interaction consisted of being addressed by shopkeepers. As a result, the buildings within the environment and the merchants at the TRF carried the burden of immersing spectators in the history and encouraging play.

The small number of actors in a comparatively large space does make interaction less likely on a regular basis. In order to compensate for

the size of the environment, the TRF has come to utilize commerce as part of the performance. The use of the shops becomes significant in audience interaction, compensating for the imbalance between the actors, the size of the site, and the volume of spectators. This exchange of goods between the shops and the spectators carries a great deal of the weight in creating the feel of the historical period as well. With this process, history becomes a commodity readily available to the tourist/visitor. Once commodified, community and identity are based upon the exchange of historical goods—both real and ephemeral.

As with the previous chapter, it is helpful to begin with a brief history of the festival, a description of the performance environment, and a look at the historical framework being used for the main scenario. This material will be contextualized with the actual history of the period. This examination of the TRF will also include the symbols being deployed in the performance as well as the authenticity of this material and the tourist community consuming it. Having explored these concepts it will be possible to delve into the impact of and interaction between commodification and the areas of performance, identity, and authenticity.

A Brief History of the TRF

Before moving to Texas to create the TRF, George Coulam initially began the Minnesota Renaissance Festival in 1969. His love of Renaissance festivals began during his years as a graduate student in Southern California. While there, he attended Patterson's California Pleasure Faire and wanted to become more involved. Beginning as a hawker for a stained glass artisan, he went on to become a stained glass artist himself. His attempts to begin a Renaissance festival in his hometown of Salt Lake City were short-lived. After two years of leasing

difficulties, it became apparent that the Mormon community did not appreciate his efforts.

From Utah, Coulam moved on to Minnesota, and having extensively studied Disney's ideas on theme park construction, applied these new ideas to the Renaissance festival. Concerned about the fact that he was, once again, leasing land, Coulam began to look for land he could buy. In addition to having studied Disney's notions on the construction of theme parks, Coulam also read Disney's "Reedy Creek Development Plan" and began to look for land that he could buy, outright, in order to construct his new Renaissance festival. Todd Mission, Texas, suited his needs, and he began construction with the reincorporation of the town. This act resulted in one of the most unusual aspects of the Texas Renaissance Festival: the "TRF is the only event of its kind in the nation that is commingled with the company town of Plantersville TX. Coulam is its mayor" (Simons 39). By buying the land in Texas and incorporating a defunct town, Coulam gained sales tax revenues and prevented future bureaucratic hassles.

Before being able to reap these benefits, for a number of years, Coulam lived on the grounds of the TRF in a trailer that also served as the festival office. In order to establish the TRF as an autonomous community, he reinvested all of the profits during his early years back into the festival. Growth and incorporation has allowed it to become a self-sustaining entity. Although Coulam thought of building other Renaissance festivals after the opening of the TRF in 1975, he found that running more than one festival was far too time consuming for one person. He sold his interest in the Minnesota festival in 1976 and concentrated on the TRF on a full time basis. The festival has since grown from 33,000 patrons in their first year to over 300,000 annually. According to Orvis Melvin, the TRF Marketing Director, an estimated five million patrons have come through

the gates over their years of operation (email 11/04/02). In 1992, Coulam developed a performance company at the TRF, which now trains more than five hundred interactive entertainers in the dance and mannerisms of the Renaissance period. The entertainment structure resembles that of the Scarborough Faire, with members of the resident cast comprising a steering committee and a core company. In addition to the entertainment director, the TRF employs a dramaturge on a permanent basis.

The care for the quality of the immersive experience extends well beyond the actors at the TRF. Coulam has made a concerted effort to create a detailed world for these actors to inhabit. To this end, the TRF has been under continuous improvement. The festival stretches over fifty acres, containing over three hundred thirty shops and twenty-two stages, and is cared for by a permanent horticulturist who develops and maintains the landscaping for the site. In addition, I noticed on my way through the parking lot to the front gates a camping area for audience members. According to the Melvin, the festival supports an average of one thousand five hundred campers on a nightly basis.

Describing the Environment

The journey to the TRF, which extends along a number of highways, is somewhat long and confusing. Lying outside of Houston, between Plantersville and Magnolia, Texas, on FM 1774, few signs mark the direction and location of the festival. Even though I visited the TRF three times, each time I got lost on the smaller highways leading to the festival, giving a greater sense of travel to a distant location both in physical and temporal terms. The site of the TRF, like that of the Scarborough Faire, is isolated from view, enhancing the feeling of immersion. The drive leading up to the site has large stands of pine on either side of the dirt road. In addition, these pines define the aisles of the

parking area, helping to limit sight and signaling the visitor's entry into another time and place. The parking lot at the site is enormous enough to accommodate the number of spectators who come daily, and the visitor cannot see the front gates of the festival. Only one side of the parking aisle remains open as an exit for cars, and the other side ends in a broad path leading to the, as yet, unseen gates. The walkway is lined with colorful banners and banks of flowers, and a few actors stationed along the walkway begin to engage the crowd as they stroll to the gates. The transition from the parking lot to the gates is a gradual one, where elements of the history and the performance begin to subtly layer themselves.

After a long walk, anywhere from five to fifteen minutes depending upon where a person's car is parked, the massive entry gradually comes into view. A large brick entrance area with huge stone walls and gates easily over twenty feet high confronts the visitor. One cannot even glimpse the other side except through the narrow gate openings. In 2000, the TRF added a costume shop just outside the front entrance so that visitors could stop at a small shop and rent costumes for the day.[2] Many of the costumes within look nearly new and represent clothing that the Renaissance middle class might wear. The majority of the selection includes blousy shirts in various colors for the men, large hats with plumes, and trousers. For women there are long skirts, garlands, peasant style blouses, and brightly colored bodices. The selection is fairly large and varied in terms of styles, colors, and sizes.

Once inside, the spectator is met with and awed by the expanse of the site and architecture within the festival grounds. People slow down significantly in an attempt to decide where to go. The decision is facilitated by the sale of programs ($4) within the front gate; they contain maps and detailed shop listings. The programs, however, vary in size and

content from year to year at the TRF. The program for 1998, The Year of the Royal Games, contains far more material and detailed information about the festival than the 2000, Year of Discovery, program. Both contain basic information; however, the 1998 program also boasts a number of brief articles on history, language, and traditions, in addition to short descriptions for nearly every shop on the site and thumbnail biographies of some core cast members.

Each program also includes a detailed map for the visitor. The village is surrounded by a perimeter of shops in addition to large isolated rings of shops scattered through its center. The architecture has a feeling of permanence to the structures that some festivals lack. The buildings look aged and most are fairly large in keeping with the image of a large village with a substantial population. Designs vary in terms of period and culture, Bavarian and Tudor half-timber constructions sit side by side with French villas and fantasy cottages. Each has a sizeable upper story where many of the merchants live during the run of the festival. The result is a feeling of an urban residence, more so than buildings at other festivals. The large setting combined with the number of shops makes the festival difficult to navigate, which actually heightens the feeling of being immersed in a history.

There is a powerful, sometimes overwhelming, sense of either getting lost or actually *being* lost, which emphasizes the role of the tourist. Were it not for the large number of patrons in modern clothing, the illusion would be even more pronounced. Having been to the TRF no less than three times, I would have expected to begin to know my way around the grounds, but even with a map, each time I found myself getting turned around and ending up somewhat lost. As a tourist in the environment, this feels both alarming and exhilarating. No one wants to be lost, and when this happens the lack of familiarity may cause a mild panic—where is my

car, where are the people I came with? At the same time, the lack of familiarity is precisely what the tourist wants. It provides a wholly immersive experience within a foreign culture, which in this particular instance is also a history. The potential for getting, or actually being, lost also serves to consolidate a feeling of community among the other tourists. The experience is made possible by the number, size, and arrangement of the buildings and stages within the TRF.

Examining the layout of the village, the site partitions itself into what could be viewed as smaller sub-communities. Certain areas of the village appear to have specific themes that are reflected in the name of the area or some of the items sold, in particular varieties of foods. For example, Taverna de Vino is an area selling Italian foods and hosting a royal wine tasting. Other places, the Moroccan Bazaar and the Captain's Galley, for example, serve a similar purpose. Actors and others who favor a particular community (belly dancers, pirates, et al.) tend to congregate in these areas. The TRF, due to its size, can use these smaller themed communities to offer more diverse cultural material without disruption to the history represented in the scenarios and in which the audience is immersed. These communal pockets act as sub-themes within the larger world of the TRF, and their symbols provide resonances for spectators. People may find it easier to insert themselves into this smaller community inside the performance, giving them a sense of belonging within a larger framework in the village. In this way, a person has the opportunity to solidify an identity and a membership in a community before venturing into a larger area. In addition, this also provides more and varied symbols for the history being presented allowing an even larger cross-section of the audience access to a community within the festival.

The Historical Framework for the TRF

Regardless of the sub-communities in operation at the festival, the main scenarios and theme for the TRF, as at other Renaissance festivals, still serve to aid the actors in providing a framework for the improvisation. The material used within the scenarios is often created specifically to fit with the circumstances of the given Renaissance festival. The Scarborough Faire, because it is more intimate in scale and cast size, generally creates a scenario that directly involves the village to a certain extent. As a result, the presented scenario is somewhat more focused in terms of subject matter and history. In the case of the TRF, the physical size of the festival requires a broader historical scenario for play, especially since, in this case, the conflict produced within the scenario does not, nor can it, necessarily effect or have meaning for all the inhabitants of the village. The area is simply too large to make such a use of the scenario particularly effective. As a result, the scenarios at the TRF tend to involve only members of the royal court with few consequences or concern for the inhabitants of New Market. Instead, the New Market's role within the scenario is to serve as a setting for the royal court and as such is portrayed as a tourist destination for both the royal court and the visiting spectators. In order to provide interest for visitors who return each year, these scenarios change annually.

The 1998 scenario featured the royal games, defining Renaissance games through affiliation with twenty-first century notions of gaming. The cover of the 1998 program presented a busty woman in a modern interpretation of Renaissance wench attire—ruffled off-the-shoulder blouse under a low-cut and un-boned bodice. She smiles with allure, one hand holding a fan of cards with a medieval design while the other hand brandishes a cigar. Cards and tobacco leaves were certainly familiar for the more wealthy individuals of the Renaissance. The image, however, speaks to a secondary media influence derived from Las Vegas casinos

and portrayals of swinging, hip lifestyles, seen in many television shows. Inside the program, a slightly more historical, but no less fictional, reading of history is presented.

> The year is 1539. King Henry VIII has ordered royal games at New Market village to greet his German bride and Queen, Anne of Cleves. . . .Queen Anne is reported to speak little English and know even less of the world beyond the Rhine . . .Desiring that his bride, and her court be tutored . . . in the English fashion, his Majesty has bid the realm's leading merchants and artisans to present their rarest goods, choicest cuisines, and finest entertainments for Queen Anne's edification. And what could be merrier than dazzling jousts and jolly village contests illustrating the beloved English traditions of friendly competition, good sportsmanship, and fair play? (1)

Queen Anne's edification, by extension, is our own. She stands in for the audience and learns what they, too, need to learn. As visitors to the village, the spectator is a stranger, possibly unaccustomed to what may be found there. Even for returning patrons, the scenario has changed, requiring an understanding of the performance situation. While Anne's education acts as a dramatic device, allowing the spectator to associate herself with the queen, the spectator can enter into this performance in other ways. She a) is a good English citizen, if not from this village then from somewhere else, b) can ignore the scenario by playing out her own, or c) can choose not to participate actively at all. The preferred reading of this passage may be for the spectator to see herself as Queen Anne and understand that what has been prepared for the queen has also been prepared for her. The presentation of the best of English spirit and culture has been offered up to the Queen as an example of the culture to a foreigner. The spectator, although seen as a visitor from the surrounding

historical landscape, is also a foreigner. The purpose of the royal court's presence, like that of the audience, is one of tourism, and it sets up the beginnings of the spectator's tourist community.

The conflict within the scenario takes its form in two different ways. First, the purpose of the visit is the new Queen's acclimation. In this instance, the struggle arises from a culture clash. Visitors can share in this particular aspect of the scenario; they too, have the experience of being strangers in a strange land. A second conflict, driving a specific performance in which the spectator is never directly involved, comes from the clash between the king and the games master of Cleves.

> Thrilled with the prospect of Royal Games in her honor, and very anxious to please, Queen Anne has brought 'The Games Master of Cleves' to counsel her in strategy and skill. A gentleman of legendary drive for victory; he has never lost a game. Hath his Majesty a strategy to keep his Royal Games from sparking full-scale war with Cleves? Prepare for merry mayhem . . . (1)

Out of ignorance, Anne introduces someone who could beat the English, thus initiating what could be construed as a threat to the king's pride. The conflict produces spectacle for the audience. Will they go to war? While this seems like an exciting prospect and one in keeping with a possible viewer expectation of the time period, it has a potential for danger and larger consequence. But because the tourist experience needs to be a safe one, the program specifically couches the conflict in terms of zany fun. It must do so in order to maintain a safe area for play that cannot be mistaken for anything but play. Allowing the cultural conflict to become serious indirectly advocates and condones similar behavior for the audience. The spectators are already immersed in a village with sub-communities representing different cultures, all of which much remain at

peace in order for the performance to operate with success on a larger level.

Competition and conflict of a different sort drives the scenario for the 2000 TRF, The Year of Discovery. The program for 2000 is dissimilar to that of 1998 and illustrates an attempt at a more historical approach to the performance. The cover is drawn, rather than photographed, and depicts an antique Renaissance map of the world with portraits of festival characters at the corners. Inside, the scenario description states that the year is now 1518, twenty-one years prior to the action presented in 1998.

> . . . King Henry VIII, Queen Katherine of Aragon and their brilliant court have gathered at the great harvest festival at New Market to award a coveted new title: Admiral of the Oceans and Warden of New Found Lands. The honors are to go to the first intrepid explorer to present solid evidence that he has claimed a fine portion of the mysterious New World for England. And Their Majesties have spent the year since their challenge was issued planning to honor the winner and showcase his exotic New World treasures royally! . . . But alas: 'twould seem that two swashbuckling explorers have arrived to claim the prize . . . (1)

Again, competition provides a basis for the theme within the festival. In addition, the remainder of the program contains information similar to the 1998 program with merchants "determined to surpass the Discoveries of the New World" having been assembled for our pleasure. The audience continues to occupy the role of tourist without the main scenario affecting that status within the village. Chapter Two described how it is acceptable to change scenarios in order to prevent returning spectators from becoming bored, but changing standard and familiar characters and the people who play them is a complex process because of audience attachment. While the historical sequence between the 1998 and 2000

performance seems odd, it is not considered unusual. The main historical frames are often not, nor do they need to be linear in any way from year to year and often are not. Much of the decision depends on what the production staff wishes to use as a theme and whether or not specific actors are available for the larger roles.

Contextualizing the History for the TRF

Although the history has shifted from 1539 to 1518, the scenario available for the spectators still contains the possibility of the spectacular and the dangerous. The main conflict between the two sailors, however, is diffused by the language and appearance of the program and the performance. Billed as "a rollicking voyage," the material presented by these characters involves novelties and tall tales of the New World. What is potentially distressing is the scenario's eliding of the beginnings of European colonization and its appropriation and destruction of other, typically non-Western, cultures. The language brushes past this material, making it more palatable for the tourist. Nowhere is there a mention of the Spanish missionaries destroying the native cultures of South America, or the enslavement of native peoples by soldiers looking for gold. These historical events would not be palatable for the tourist audience nor would they necessarily be a part of the audience's expectations for the period of history.

While the above is unfortunate, it is important to remember that entertainment remains the primary focus for the Renaissance festival, and in order to be entertaining, the history must be recognizable as based upon expectations. This need takes precedent over historical accuracy, forcing the performance to focus on elements of recognition for the audience. While the teaching of history has gradually been expanding to include revisionist understandings of what actually happened during early

exploration, much of the public's desired understanding of that history only emphasizes the adventure and courage involved in these acts of exploration as opposed to the greed or exploitation. Rather than bringing forward aspects of colonialism, the festival world focuses on the expected, bizarre, or more innocuous material affiliated with Renaissance exploration, such as the discovery of the mysterious vegetable from the wilds of North America—the potato.

The TRF does not present factual historical events in order to educate; instead, it often eschews them in order to provide a purely entertaining experience. Unlike the Scarborough Faire, not all Renaissance festivals choose to implement an educational program within the performance. The individual choices to do so or not would be the purview of the production staff and owners of the festival. As Scarborough Faire director Coy Sevier explained, a program for area schools requires opening the festival on a weekday with the cooperation of a majority of the shopkeepers and actors. Some larger festivals are not able or willing to coordinate such an undertaking. In fact, the sheer size of the TRF would make this extremely difficult. While this seems to place larger festivals at a disadvantage, the larger festival can incorporate a greater cross-section of world culture apart from any scenario framing the production for a given year. Such a practice is educational, in its own way, in that the TRF can cover historical material from other cultures and readily incorporate these without creating difficulties with the reality of the performance. Further, adding more cultural and historical offerings creates the opportunity for a larger cross-section of spectators to connect with the material being offered at the TRF.

Symbolizing the Renaissance

Currently, popular readings of history have a great deal of marketing power, given the trends in film and television. Film especially has enjoyed the draw of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with works such as Timeline, A Knight's Tale, Braveheart, Elizabeth, and Shakespeare in Love. Chapter One outlined Eco's ideas that the pop cultural return to the Middle Ages is predicated on a desire to find roots. At the Scarborough Faire, this desire is not so much to find roots as a continuation of popular culture's love affair with the romantic views of this particular past. While some can and do connect with a search for their roots, at the TRF, "[many] seem less concerned to find a past than to yearn for it, eager not so much to relive a fancied long-ago as to collect its relics and celebrate its virtues" (Lowenthal, Past 7). The tourist does not necessarily want to participate in the Renaissance as a whole, just in the parts that could be considered the most fun. These choices find basis in touristic expectations that come from a range of media which represents broad symbolic aspects of a particular history.

The broader the symbolic representation of the history, the more likely it will be used to evoke the history. Such a practice feeds itself. Once a symbol is used to cue the audience's expectations, it becomes an indispensable part of creating the period being performed. Those aspects that strongly suggest a particular past for the largest number of spectators will be deemed "best." Often these elements are pulled from romantic notions of the history. For example, the two most effective, and therefore most expected, elements of a Renaissance festival are the joust and the turkey leg. Without these symbols, the period remains ambiguous for a majority of people. Since other elements beyond these examples are required to create the immersive environment, the spectators need markers that will help them to read other symbols of the history helping to fill in the remaining environment.

The program for the TRF helps the spectator by labeling other events and symbols as "Renaissance," pointing out what these quintessential aspects are by serving as an historical Baedeker, a Victorian tourist guide that listed, ranked, and rated the absolute must-sees for the traveler aboard in Europe. The 1998 program contains, in addition to the maps, lists of shops describing their wares, performances, histories and material of the period, and, significantly, phrases so that you may talk to, and like, the natives. The program even breaks down the various performances into categories, such as "Spectacular," "Rousing," "Educational," and "Classical," making it easier for the spectator to find the experience they want or need. Just as documentary filmmakers edit historical material to contain only the most important events, spectators are shown, and may likely prefer, a quick sightseeing tour of the history—the glamour, the spectacular, the violent—rather than view the actual, and messier, historical process.

In constructing the Renaissance festival for a group of tourist/spectators, the production staff needs to make some specific decisions concerning what and how things will be represented. Like many proponents of heritage, they assemble "luminous details from the archive of the remembered—a fantasized—past. The details declare an order that was once natural and whole, against which the present is viewed as hopelessly fallen" (Bickerts 20). This idealized Renaissance has available and approachable leaders, happy people, and none of the problems plaguing modern society. There is plenty. The entire presentation of the festival is one where conflict is present, yet it remains a minor component of the experience and is resolved to everyone's satisfaction without causing harm. For example, the TRF actually stages a scenario calling for an execution. The 2000 program contains a schedule listing the

progression of scenarios involving the royal court. In the late afternoon, an execution is planned, and the description of action states:

> Condemned for treasonous fraud against the crown, the unmasked villain faces a traitor's death on the New Market gibbet. Shall the evening's Royal Revels kick off with a gruesome execution? Who will take the honors, and who will face the New Market Hangman—or worse? Prepare ye for a rollicking voyage to New Worlds of merriment, laughter and love! (5)

Historically, under Henry VIII, this type of activity was an actuality and, unfortunately, all too common. Some individuals might expect some sort of execution or trial to occur in order to keep with certain touristic expectations of the Renaissance. What is unexpected is the language used to describe the feeling after such activity. The two descriptions are at odds with one another while keeping with the presentation of a spectacle for the tourists.

The transition promises a less gory outcome to the conflict. Typically, most execution scenarios end with the ruling monarch or someone in authority, shouting "Hold!" The monarch, or a surrogate, then explains that during a festival no one may shed blood because it would desecrate the spirit of the festival. With this, the scenario ends, and the victim is pardoned. The community idealized by the festival gives the impression that transgressions are punished, but not necessarily with a negative or traumatic outcome. This results in part from the description of the activity as pleasurable and in part because the spectators know and recognize the event as play, and thus without permanent consequence.

Historical Authenticity at the TRF

The Renaissance festival is not the only venue to temper and sanitize history. Many heritage sites do so to a greater or lesser extent,

depending upon the purpose of the environment and its performance. The greatest influence depends upon whether or not they are there for entertainment or education. Therein lays the conflict. “Such attractions [like Disneyland] vary enormously in their emphasis on the education/entertainment ratio. . . . These in their own way contribute to our historical amnesia through a quotation, or rather misquotation, of historical styles . . .” (Walsh 103). In terms of education, this is disturbing. If, however, the purpose behind the performance is meant as entertainment, such amnesia and misquotation can encourage questioning of the history whether such a questioning is conscious or not. The flexibility has the effect of encouraging experimentation.

Presentation of the past when encouraging play can actually serve to validate and sustain the present and the future—sometimes at the expense of what really happened. Often, in supporting this, history is presented as the society wishes it to have been. Disney and its creations utilize this and take the brunt of the criticism. The Disney-esque presentation of history, or *distory*, “at least to date, is about history as it should have happened” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 175). While this is a double-edged sword, it can be used to good purpose. Venues married to a presentation of history “as it happened” cannot play with history as wishful thinking. Certainly, many living history venues cannot really participate in pursuing this possibility. These places have made a commitment to presenting history and heritage as authentically as possible even when such presentations may not be popular.[3] Although such a trend in the presentation of history could be negative, there is a potential in the responsible use of history as it “should have happened.” The TRF deals in distory so that the opportunity exists for play and possibility.

But whether history is presented as true to events or as distory, the complexity comes in deciding whose history is being performed. While

the main scenario frame within the TRF supports an Anglo-centric view of Renaissance history, as mentioned earlier, the size of the festival supports a much larger cultural and historical cross section. Cultural identification and community not only have the historical flexibility in terms of the performance, but this flexibility exists on a larger physical scale as well. The shops can, in fact, evoke a wide variety of cultures. For example, Noble House purveys a range of goods very much in keeping with what Marco Polo perhaps would have brought back in his travels. The exterior of the building evokes this through the architecture, which resembles something that might have been designed by Palladio during the Italian Renaissance. Other shops, such as Baubles and Bangles or Komodo Dragon, sell items from Morocco, Indonesia, and Japan. Their exteriors also reflect the architecture of the culture producing the materials for sale.

While the dominant order producing the Renaissance festival certainly reflects a Western European, and in particular English, view of history, a reliance on the physical environment to produce the history can help to diffuse the dominance and offer other readings.

> There is a 'dominant cultural order' although this is not at all uniform or necessarily completely agreed upon. In addition, subcultures help to provide a dictionary of meanings for various possible readings. We do, in fact, draw upon a certain level of common interpretations though they can be read differently. (Morly 126-130)

The buildings do not necessarily have to ascribe to the scenario framework; they are not actors in a traditional sense. This offers an opportunity for other cultures and sub-cultures to impose their own readings on the history in a physical way.

Tourist Communities

Unlike the performance at the Scarborough Faire, the visitors to the TRF are firmly located within the temporal community as tourists. Within this framework, they may take on any number of potential identities, but they still occupy a position outside of the TRF community delineated by both the community of the performance in addition to the community of Todd Mission. As outsiders, they comprise a tourist community in a more traditional sense. They have come to Todd Mission/New Market in order to sightsee, to experience something different. The role ascribed to everyone as they enter is that of visitor to the village, and invitations to become a member of the New Market community are few. The wording within the program makes this position fairly clear by placing Queen Anne as a tourist in England. She stands in for the audience by representing their experience in this new place/time. As a community of tourists, identity will be built from this particular viewpoint by both the performance environment and the spectators themselves.

Ultimately, all tourists are travelers, granting them a specific social standing that offers a certain status. The TRF affords them the same status as the visiting queen—that of foreign dignitaries who must be impressed. As outsiders, they do not fall under the cultural framework of the society they visit and are accorded permissiveness on several cultural levels. “The traveler, by definition, is someone who has the security and privilege to move about in relatively unconstrained ways” (Clifford 107). For the most part this is true, although there are usually areas that are restricted from the tourist for different reasons—safety, respect for the culture, *et cetera*—but these restrictions are usually a combination of an imposition of the culture being visited and the type of tourist in question. For example, there have been recent conflicts between the Washoe Indians of the Lake Tahoe Basin and the rock climbers who enjoy the challenges of

Cave Rock (Roberts 26-29). The Washoe believe Cave Rock to be a sacred space, and as such, they no longer want climbers to have unfettered access to the site. The climbers' presence they believe, desecrates Cave Rock. Traditionally, shamans have only had access after strenuous rites have been completed. It is likely that anthropologists, who ideally respect and follow the parameters of the culture they study, would be allowed conditional access. The two types of tourists, one invested in pleasure and the other in cultural understanding, would be allotted access ranging from none to restricted or conditional.

In the case of the TRF, restrictions are few. Visitors are allowed to roam the village freely with the exception of backstage areas and food preparation areas. These entrances remain hidden, giving the impression of complete accessibility for the tourist; they cannot see any entry to the backstage areas. Even so, spectators can occasionally gain access by accident, and they are gently escorted back to the main area. But, in terms of the history represented, people may wander where they will. For example, women may enter the pub areas without fear of traditional Renaissance labels for women who frequented public houses.

Regardless of restrictions, or sometimes precisely because of these restrictions, the tourists' primary need is to confirm their own expectations of the travel experience, attempting to be willing strangers while still demanding a level of familiarity, accessibility, and twenty-first century comfort. These expectations dictate and drive the material the TRF performs for the spectator. The symbols and buildings assembled via the commerce create the Renaissance festival and its community rather than it being created through reliance upon the interaction between the characters and the visitors. In such a situation, the visual aspects of the performance become more important because "[t]he gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs" (Urry 3). Because the tourist

gaze varies, the environment will need to perform or purvey as many signs as possible to appeal to the tourist. Without this effort, the experience falls short of the spectator's expectations.

The TRF presents a hodge-podge of collected symbols evoking not only the Renaissance, but also material from other epochs that speak to other interpretations of "the past." The ability to incorporate this diversity makes it possible for the performance to open itself to people from varied cultures, allowing them to insert themselves into the narrative. Earlier, I outlined how the TRF can be broken down and viewed as a collection of sub-communities. This loosely organizes possible interpretations of the people and performances that can be seen in these areas. For example, one of the largest sub-communities within the TRF is the Moroccan Bazaar. This area contains items, characters, and performances affiliated with the Middle East and elements of the Silk Road trade route. The performances here do not touch upon the Tudor framework for the TRF, but instead allow spectators to view another cultural history running parallel to that of England. The Scarborough Faire, while intimate, does not have this larger sense of histories and cultures operating separately from its own framework. With a broad collection of representations of the Renaissance, the TRF readily conforms to a greater number of potential expectations and requires an extremely large environment in order to encompass the variations.

The spectators at the Renaissance festival foster the tourist gaze, and their craving for experience, by inserting themselves into the community and the historical narrative through participation. The community of the performance makes this easy through the commodities it makes available to the spectator. Props, such as mugs, swords, and costumes, give the audience the ability to build an identity from the wares of the community; identity and community may be bought, even though

"[t]ourists . . . seek not merchandise but experience . . . promises of sensation or renewal, inspiration or plain diversion. Experience is hard to commodify" (Kennedy 175). Part of the experience at the Renaissance festival can be commodified by providing material that promises a greater level of participation and community. The actors and the larger performances engage the spectators/tourists as they consume the site and the various wares offered within it.

How the tourist views the Renaissance festival, whether as entertainment or history, or even both, takes into account the ideas of Urry, who believes that tourist interpretation not necessarily homogenous. In a similar vein, Cohen does not view community as necessarily homogenous either. Both factor in the experience of the individual within a broader interpretation of a tourist gaze and community respectively. Urry observes that the reasons for the presence of the tourist at a given site vary widely from individual to individual. "There is no single tourist gaze as such. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period" (Urry 1). Cohen expresses something similar in his views that individuals will read the symbols bounding the community differently and that these also vary in terms of society and history. This is not to say that gaining any insight is impossible, only that the interpretation of this gaze will be determined and guided by a series of known factors. In addition, Urry notes, "to consider how social groups construct their tourist gaze is a good way of getting at just what is happening in the 'normal society'" (2). Once again, such a statement harkens back to the principles and ideas put forth by Schechner and Lowenthal regarding performance and history. The gaze indicates identity because it reveals aspects of who the tourist wishes to be or how she wishes to be seen by others.

The tourist gaze, however, is fickle and needs to be compelled in order to be engaged to participate. The actor can still encourage

participation through interpersonal interaction at the TRF, but there is a much smaller probability for its occurrence. In each of my visits, I behaved as I did at the Scarborough Faire, conducting research, talking into a tape recorder, taking photographs. Unlike at the Scarborough Faire, however, my actions attracted no attention from the actors whatsoever, only some odd looks from my fellow spectators. The interaction that occurred was initiated and sustained by me rather than by the actor. The interactions I did observe were largely being conducted between staged performances and the audience. The Ded Bob Sho, outlined in the introduction, in particular, has a high level of interactivity for the audience. At the beginning of the scheduled act, Ded Bob, a skeleton puppet manipulated by his human servant, Smuj (Clark Orwick), encourages the audience to gather more people by yelling out to them. This large group interaction settles into selecting audience members to become Zombies and participate in the show. Most audience interaction for the national acts progresses in much the same way, alternating between group and individual participation.

Commodification and Performance

The culture within the United States encourages an association between materialism, community, and identity. One possible reading of the TRF reveals how current society constructs history as acts of commerce. Because the present operates on commerce, and people are used to viewing their day-to-day lives as a sequence of commercial transactions, the Renaissance is presented with a similar veneer. Consumerism operates in tandem with the performance to help build identity and community within the Renaissance festival. The performance itself is a method of cognitive acquisition, especially if the actors engage and encourage the taking on of a persona. The environment, both as a

performance and as a place for the shops, further entices the audience to take on an identity. As a result, the audience determines the level of identity and community within the environment.

Presenting history as a tourist commodity works best in a themed environment. This environment does not necessarily have to pertain exclusively to theme parks; even places like Plimouth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg represent historical theme parks in their re-creations of an environment. Adding performance not only makes the connection to history more immediate, it can also impart the desire to identify with the actors who make that connection between history and the audience. The level of commodification occurring at the TRF makes the identification possible through taking an extra step. "Themed environments work not only because they are connected to the universe of commodities and are spaces of consumption, but because they offer consumers a spatial experience that is an attraction by itself; that is, they promote the consumption of space" (Gottdiener, "Consumption" 14). Certainly the space itself provides a draw for the audience. But once there, the consumption of the space becomes synonymous with consumption of the history presented by and within it. At the TRF, visitors purchase tickets and "buy" into the interpretation with which they are presented. With the size of the festival comes the necessity to promote consumption of the space over that of the interactive performances in order to handle the difficulties with performative density. The dispersion of actors over a large area can eventually affect the sense of community within the festival if theirs is the only performance being relied upon to produce it.

All of the items for sale, however, distill into one specific commodity that drives the entire performance—history. The TRF sells to the public a view of the Renaissance as the visitors wish to see it. Through encouragement to participate in this vision of a mythologized past, the

Renaissance festival commodifies history so that audience members can consume it not only materially, but also spatially and symbolically. This process creates a mode of experience that remains part of the complex layers of commodification within the Renaissance festival. Tourism requires experiences, and items representative of those experiences, to become obtainable commodities. There must be a physical marker—proof—that the tourist went to a particular location and had an experience indicative of that place. Many people take photos as experiential markers. Others purchase souvenirs that reflect the culture visited.

The TRF has many different commodities available, covering as many symbols indicative of the Renaissance as possible. Most of these conform to popular expectations of the period. Often people purchase mugs or goblets, which, as symbols, embody the notion that the Renaissance in England was a time of merriment and drinking. Other items include walking staffs and voluminous woolen cloaks for those people who view the Renaissance as a time of Tolkein-esque journeys. Without these items, the performance environment's connection to the past remains unsatisfactory and vague. Participation in this commerce provides a way of relating the experience to the identity of the individual. The purchase of Renaissance items grounds the tourist in a particular past and confirms their experience of the environment. The individual will choose items that best symbolize the history and the experience of the TRF for themselves. History and the experience of history can thus be commodified for tourist consumption.

In general, festivals of any sort, not just Renaissance festivals, represent and recreate specific things (histories, cultures, et al.) in order to offer them as a commodity for a broad audience. They "re-enact, re-present, and re-create activities and places in a discrete performance setting designed for spectacular (and aural) commerce" (Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett 6). The TRF is set well apart and as wholly autonomous from the nearby region, specifically to create a village of shops. In this respect, it is not altogether unlike a mall. The entire layout of both the shops and the stages serves to create a spectacle for audience enjoyment. The spectator has purchased a ticket in order to consume the environment in terms of both sight and the physical commodities available. Once inside the gates, the TRF offers other events, both open and restricted, for the spectator.

The large performance events serve the same purpose as anchor stores in malls. Anchors are usually bigger stores, such as Macy's, J. C. Penney's or Sears, that occupy the endpoints of the mall's construction. They draw people to the mall through name recognition and help to draw foot traffic through the smaller stores inside the building. Jousts and feasts work in a similar way. They aid in attracting the spectator to the festival and pull her to the interior of the performance once there.

Once the spectator has been pulled into the environment, two acts of consumption potentially occur: the consumption of the environment itself through visual and physical participation, and the draw to consume the items on display within the environment. Performances within the TRF motivate both of these activities by providing an environment driven by the tourist gaze. The buildings and characters are meant to be visually consumed, eventually leading to more conventional fiscal consumption. "By extending the period of 'just looking,' the imaginative prelude to buying the mall encourages 'cognitive acquisition' as shoppers mentally acquire commodities by familiarizing themselves with a commodity's actual and imagined properties" (Crawford 13). In using performance to extend the looking process at the TRF, the spectator has the opportunity to familiarize herself with the commodities and possible identities available to her.

The purchase of a specific item exerts a more powerful draw upon imagined properties and how these can become actual personal properties. The sword remains a powerful symbol of the period, and there are several shops for these within the TRF. Extremely expensive, the purchase of this item serves several purposes. First, it does imply wealth on the part of the buyer, not unlike the gentlemen of the Renaissance. The average broadsword price begins at around $200-$500 depending on the design, size, and quality of the steel. Second, the weapon denotes power and strength whether it is worn by a male or a female. As with any item, what the purchaser believes it imparts to them will finally rely upon their perception of the symbolism derived from it. But the type of item bought does speak to the identity the individual wishes to impart, whether they chose to directly participate in the performance or not.

People at the TRF also participate through the purchased access to other events, costumes, and historical items, but whatever is chosen by the visitor has meaning for them at some level. Certain signs of the Renaissance are relied upon to a great extent to "sell" the environment to the audience.

> [T]he commercial environment, taken as a whole has increasingly been designed as a sign itself, as some symbolic space that connotes something other than its principle function—the realization of capital through the stimulation of consumer desires and the promotion of sales. It provides a form of entertainment while stimulating the transformation of individuals to commodity-craving selves. (Gottdiener, Themeing 75)

The TRF's commercial environment displays a particular form of entertainment that is interactive in nature. The interaction, whether it comes from stage shows, street characters, or shopkeepers, can stimulate a desire to participate. Participation at the TRF can occur through the

purchase of items, which openly displays a desire to participate on the part of a spectator, or through the purchase of extra experiences, such as the feast. Shows and characters regularly use visible symbols of the Renaissance—those same mugs, walking staffs, and swords found in the shops—as they wander through the fair. The item's use, primarily as a symbol, but also in its intended function, can stimulate desire in the patron to acquire it. Much like the kid on the playground with the coolest athletic shoes, the actors make the items more visible and more representative of the Renaissance through their use of them. While the main purpose of such an environment can be said to make money, the space creates a symbol, in this case a history, which then creates a meaning for the spectator/tourist and in turn drives a desire to participate in or possess some aspect of the environment.

But the stimuli that spectators require to help jump start their imaginations are not random. These images and items instead reflect aspects of the society creating the performances. These choices and representations of the past reveal the extent to which the current society values them. "Collective frameworks are . . . precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society" (Halbwachs 40). Of course, these thoughts vary from culture to culture depending upon who produces the performance. Indeed, this may even vary from community to community and festival to festival. At the Scarborough Faire, the focus of the past is community where interaction between individuals is expected and key in its development. Smaller festivals can foster this aspect more readily; the smaller environment in addition to a higher ratio of actors to audience members aids in this. For a larger festival, such as the TRF, the overwhelming focus seems to be that of commodification—what pieces of the past can evoke the Renaissance

and be sold. These saleable parts may be individual performances and experiences or physical items.

How these experiences and items are determined depends upon the amount of significance that the tourist attributes to it as a part of the experience being sought. At the TRF the significant performances tend to be the joust or the feast, while items range from pieces of clothing and jewelry to dishes and other house wares. What ultimately results is a process of sacrilisation "which renders a particular natural or cultural artifact a sacred object of the tourist ritual" (Urry 9-10; quoting MacCanell in The Tourist 42-48). Spectators would likely feel that going to a Renaissance festival means that you must see the joust, attend the feast, and eat a turkey leg. An equivalent of this would be seeing the Empire State Building if one goes to New York City. Smaller festivals, or those just starting up, such as the Hawkwood Fantasy Faire just north of Fort Worth, aspire to be able to include a joust. Offering the experience is widely perceived as a way to draw a larger audience to the performance, giving them a greater Renaissance experience. The knight and the turkey leg offer strong symbols for the tourist experience of the Renaissance, playing off of and to media interpretations of "Merrie Olde England." Without these experiences and their representative symbols to confirm the historical period, one might as well be at an historical craft show.

The shopkeepers themselves, like the actors and spectators, form their own idiosyncratic relationships with the history and its symbols. While some people do share the cultural background of the items they sell, this is not always the case. Some people have cultivated a love for the items and their manufacture, and the TRF provides a way for them to share this passion for what they sell and how it is produced. This notion of sharing is also idiosyncratic. A few shopkeepers, especially those demonstrating the craft, such as the Royal Mint, take the time to explain

the background of the processes of production and its context within the history presented at the festival. This, however, does not represent the norm. Shopkeepers, while very open about their products, will usually only answer questions about them if asked by the spectator. Information or historical context is not spontaneously offered, nor is it always possible. One booth that I ducked into during a downpour contained birdhouses made of decorated gourds—not, perhaps, a more noted household item during the Renaissance. In this case, the owner could have fictionalized a context for these items, but the explanation would have been just that—fictional.

Commodification and Identity

The space of the TRF encourages spectators to participate in the action through their own purchasing power. This turns people into members of the community via commercial transactions rather than interactions on a personal level. A majority of the program at the TRF, both for 1998 and 2000, devotes itself to listings and maps showing the location of shops and the types of goods sold. Of all the listed shops at the TRF, nearly a quarter of them sell clothing or adornment of some sort. These items, in particular, begin to help the spectator build an identity within the performance. The 1998 program devotes nearly a third of the program to thumbnail descriptions of the shops within New Market. Even the name of the village highlights commerce. These pages in the program bear a great deal of resemblance to the listings and maps on mall kiosks, creating a neighborhood made of businesses as opposed to private residences.

Subtle variations in community can be determined through commercial interaction within the shops. Within this commercial community, the actors often receive materials from the shopkeepers at a

discount. This serves as a form of advertising for the shops. If people see the characters using specific items, there is a possibility that they will wish to purchase those items as well. For me, this was not limited by the fact that I have never worked at the TRF. In stopping at a perfume booth, I saw a person who seemed vaguely familiar to me from Michigan. While talking, we realized that we knew each other from the Renaissance festival in that state. When I purchased some oils, the shopkeeper gave me a discount. While not a member of the TRF community, the shopkeeper accorded me position within the larger community of Renaissance festivals, confirming me as a member of a particular community at the festival. My act of commerce allowed me to change communities within the TRF, but the level of this change depended upon my extended interaction with the shopkeeper. I could have chosen not to have a conversation and only buy the perfume. This would have kept me within the tourist community. My choice to participate at a different level, however, allowed me to move between the tourist community and the larger festival community.

The process also offers the opportunity to play with, and then discard, a potential identity. In this situation, the individual relies upon past possibilities for this new character. Because the past is considered safer, as opposed to the unknown future, the assumption of a past persona can be as well. Through either practice, the identity of the spectator retains a point of stability at the TRF because visitors always remain members of the tourist community. From this perspective, they may contemplate any number of available identities for sale at the TRF. At the Scarborough Faire, an actor assigned me a role within the community (professor), which was then confirmed by other actors throughout the day. In contrast, rather than the solid and concrete delivery of an identity from an actor, at the TRF, tourists are free to buy or rent the one they want. The volume of

possibilities amid the TRF shops makes ultimate satisfaction difficult; there are too many possibilities to find complete satisfaction in the identity construction.

People buy things in order to build identity and to serve as souvenirs of the history at the Renaissance festival, dictating the activity of buying and selling. As defined in Chapter One, group identity is not singular but rather based on how the individual values group membership. Individual identity is no different. An individual may hold several images of the self, some of which may be perceived as being in conflict with one another, and these deeply held images will be highly idiosyncratic. As a result, the process of production and consumption are not passive or dictated by 'conditioning.' "Instead they *self-actualize* within the commercial milieu by seeking through the market ways of satisfying desires and pursing personal fulfillment that expresses deeply-held images of the self" (Gottdeiner, Themeing 7). What is available at the TRF should in fact give a large idea of how people view themselves through what is bought. The largest numbers of shops are sell items for personal adornment.

Identity can be viewed as highly visual at Renaissance festivals, just as it was in Tudor England and still is to a large extent. Gender, race, class, even profession, could be read through the clothing and the sumptuary laws governing them. But while this practice allowed for a visible hierarchy during Henry VIII's time, it serves a different purpose in the present. The TRF offers the ability for people to romanticize themselves, with no restrictions or preconditions, because the historical framework of the performance allows for a fictional or fantasy reading. The alternative characters that they invent for themselves manifest in how guests perceive and interpret the historical semiotics of the performance. In recognizing the actual or imagined qualities of the commodity/history,

shoppers can not only realize what they are, but also imagine what they might become. Myth and history simply provide a set of possibilities for choice.

People sometimes attempt to self-actualize by changing their appearance, specifically by imitating the dress of the group they wish to emulate, or by adding items to existing styles in an effort to make their own (Gottdeiner, Themeing 8).This will mark them as belonging to a specific community or in manifesting a specific identity. For some spectators at the TRF, this may be in order to be a part of the actors' community; they wish to be like the actors they see. For others, the behavior may manifest so that they can make a personal connection with the history and community being presented. Participation marks membership and this participation can take on many forms, but it primarily centers on the creation of the character/individual through the use of commodities. At the TRF, the buying and emulating serves to mark the membership of the individual in some aspect of this Renaissance festival community. While this activity might be interpreted as depending upon the needs of the individual, it serves as a sense of exclusivity among the spectator community. One venue where this active participation is most prevalent is the pub. An area of shops and food booths on the TRF map, marked as The Captain's Galley, plays host to a pub titled The Sea Devil Tavern. The motif for decorating runs to netting, starfish, and anchors. Sturdy tables face a stage where singers and musicians perform sea chanties.

While I was there, a large group of men dressed as pirates arrived. I could tell that they were not actors; they did not have the medallion marking them as employees, but they acted as if they were a part of that community. Their play and banter, consisting of shouting for an innkeeper and some "arrrrrrr"s, caused many to look, laugh, and join in the fun. The

pirates, in turn, smiled and seemed self-satisfied. These same individuals would be unlikely to command the same attention outside this venue. They were having fun, and the people in proximity to them had fun as well, as evidenced by laughter, verbal banter, and an occasional attempt to join in the action taking place. The pirates' decision to participate in this manner gave them a level of prestige among their fellow spectators. "[A]n individual will perform a behaviour to the extent that he believes that he will be able to carry it successfully to completion" (Reicher 76). The spectator is definitely allowed to succeed in this environment. Not only are they provided with positive feedback from other spectators and actors, but they also receive tutelage from observing the behavior of the actors.[4]

While at the Scarborough Faire, such instruction falls to the street characters who utilize one-on-one improvisation to illustrate behavior for the spectators, at the TRF the stage shows act as the primary source for behavior modeling. Because they are far more accessible and have interaction built into the performance, the stage shows at the TRF receive more attention than the street characters. The Washing Well Wenches, for example, quickly set up a community within their performance. Billed as, "Good clean fun. Wet dirty women," the two characters frizz their hair, blacken their teeth, and wear wet, dirty clothing. While some people might assume that this show devolves into no more than a wet t-shirt contest, the two are not particularly busty, and the clothes worn by the women are not particularly revealing. Their clothing is layered through the wearing of a laced bodice over a dark blouse and a long skirt, making it difficult, if not impossible, to see through when soaking wet. Posing as the village wash-women, they tell a tale of love and search for potential husbands. Even as they represent what might be, to some, a negative representation of women, they subvert this through the use of humor. As the performers in a stage show, they are in charge of and have power over the audience, which

they use to the detriment of the male spectators. Often these men find themselves the butt of jokes, much to the delight and cheers of the women in the audience. Though the men are the point of humor, they do enjoy the attention of being picked out of the audience and some actually look eager to participate. Refusal to participate on the part of the audience results in the minor threat of getting wet. The women soak, wind up and sling articles of clothing around their heads like human sprinklers. They model a type of wench behavior in which women are not only in charge of the action, but they do not need to meet the popular expectation of beauty or be physically revealing in order to command attention and exert power.

Modeling behavior for the audience can also have an influence on the types of items bought by the tourists. While the TRF does not fully realize or utilize the power of product placement within the environment, some areas do benefit the specific shops. The Sea Devil Tavern is conveniently located near a shop selling tankards. The actors singing in the pub gesture with and drink from similar containers, which, in turn, encourages spectators to buy the drinking cups. Additionally, the joust encourages purchases as well. A short walk from the Tournament Field will take the spectator to the Imperial Mongolian Embassy or to Angel Swords. Both shops deal in armor and armament of various styles. While the TRF emphatically does not allow the spectators to participate in any form of combat, people may carry weapons as a part of their costumes.

There is a distinct link, especially in Western society, between commodities and one's group or individual identity. The marketing of these commodities often plays upon the desire to change or mold one's identity or to mark one as a member of a group. "If the world is understood through commodities, then personal identity depends on one's ability to compose a coherent self-image through the selection of a distinct personal set of commodities" (Crawford 12). This particular activity

occurs at the Renaissance festival in a number of specific ways. First, the invitation, especially at the TRF, is to create an identity by renting or buying a costume and the accessories that make the individual distinct. These commodities then construct the character and, by default, the person playing him or her. The nature and type of crafts and objects available at the festival play into the construction of identity. Many fairs have rules restricting the amount of machine copying and manufacturing of goods. While these regulations differ from festival to festival, many of the crafts are handmade. There are copies available, perhaps varying slightly, but these are stored as inventory. The customer has the impression, rightly, of buying a one-of-a-kind handmade item. This item, like the person buying it, is distinct and individual. This furthers exclusive identity building through commodification.

The act of purchasing and possessing symbols of the Renaissance becomes not only a mode of tourist participation, but also a signal of the new identity. The item confirms the tourist's presence at the Renaissance festival in addition to signaling the new identity or association of the owner with the performance. Rather than interaction, visual cues become the important component of identity and community membership, so the gaze of other tourists can continue to make impressions and construct identity. The costume rental outside the front gates opens the possibilities for identity even before the visitor sees the inside of the festival. Should visitors choose not to rent costumes, the items they purchase within the festival also carry the potential to speak to an identity.

While the items spectators buy signal participation in the environment and association with the history, once they leave the festival the only value that remains is that of a souvenir. "Souvenirs are tangible evidences of travel that are often shared with family and friends, but what one really brings back are memories of experiences" (Graburn 33).

Ultimately, that is all one can bring back. But these items can also serve as reminders and markers of both identity and community. Commerce can make the individual a part of a larger whole, and in this case, it makes them part of history. The activity gives the impression of connection via the item purchased, associating the consumer with the experience and with other individuals who have also been to the TRF. “The purchase of such a souvenir allows the consumer the illusion of participating in the enterprise as a whole, attaining a piece of the action” (Willis 750). In essence, the spectator has bought their own piece of history, of the Renaissance. The item gives the illusion of having been there, historically, while having only been physically to a facsimile. In addition, the spectator can acquire the perception that, in possessing something from New Market, then they, too, occupy that same community. The actors often have purchased similar items as a part of their character’s costumes. Seeing the items used by “natives” reinforces the impression that the spectator has bought a place in the community.

Many people today have little or no connection with a larger sense of the past, and in some respects, the only way they can connect is through consumerism. The things we buy reflect our community and individual identities instead of or better than history. “[F]or many individuals living today, the traditional frames [of the past] have lost their resonance. For these individuals, identity is framed through active participation in the consumer culture of contemporary society” (Dowd 260). We forge a connection to the past through what we choose to purchase for ourselves. The purchases illustrate how we see that past and how we view ourselves as a part of it. As a result, history and heritage are more vivid and real when their experience and artifacts can be bought. Like sympathetic magic, the attributes of objects and events can enhance the individual in possession of them.

Because many people find community and identity through commerce, the TRF and many other history and heritage venues cater to this tendency. As a result, the history we display is often the aspects of history we wish to buy—literally and figuratively. While some historians might believe that producers of this material do so out of blind ignorance, the reality is just the opposite.

> Those who remake the past as it *ought* to have been, as distinct from what it presumably was, are keenly aware of tampering with its residues. They deliberately improve on history, memory, and relics to give the past's true nature better or fuller expression than it could attain in its own time. (Lowenthal, Past 328)

The Renaissance in England during the Tudor reign was a time of great progress for humanistic thought, political innovation, and art. The Renaissance festival heightens this sense of discovery and adventure. The Tudor rule of England was also filled with religious turmoil and persecution. The country was nearly bankrupt by the time Elizabeth I ascended the throne, and much of her reign dealt with avoiding usurpation and easing the persistent famine brought on by successive years of crop failure. The visitors to the festivals never see this side of Renaissance life. Rather, they see only the lively and exciting spectacle. Perhaps some people living during the actual Renaissance experienced this sense of their own time, but were too preoccupied with the unstable nature of everyday life and the unknown to notice or enjoy it. Spectators at the Renaissance festival have enough of this, perhaps, in their own lives, and would rather experience the spectacular that they perceive as missing from it.

Commodification and Authenticity

The environment and the commerce loop back into one another, with the environment providing the desire for the material and the material

aiding in the creation of the environment. If the TRF community did not exist, there would be few venues for the types of goods and services they make available. Earlier in this chapter, I briefly mentioned the sale of mugs and goblets as symbols for the Renaissance. Some of the mugs are specifically sold by the festival, and not independent artisans, as commemoratives. These mugs typically have a decorative medallion on the side stating the name of the festival and the date. The designs are different every year and often reflect the theme for the season. One of the articles in the 1998 program for the TRF elaborates on the history and uses of the drinking stein, and after this piece, a price guide lists the values of the commemorative drinking cups sold there. The most expensive current value is $300 for a 1988 cup with an initial price of $35. The cup, whether designed as a stein or a goblet, serves to represent not only an item from the Renaissance, but it also serves as a symbolic reminder of the "eat, drink, and be merry" attitude often associated with the time period. In this capacity, the cup's overt presence confirms that this environment is the Renaissance. In doing so, it also creates an environment in which the spectator will desire the cup, marking her as belonging to this history.

Apart from specific souvenir items, the spectator can purchase the experience of attending the feast, which offers another form of community within the TRF. In essence, this particular event presents itself as a sub-community within the entire village. The King's Arms Hall is located a very short distance away from the front gates. The program for 1998 outlines the traditions of feasting during the Renaissance and how this tradition has been created for their enjoyment in New Market. The description refers to the guests as "honored dignitaries," setting them apart from the other visitors as more than just tourists. Anyone may make reservations for the feast, and for a flat price of $69, the individual receives the meal, entrance to the festival and a commemorative cup (one

that may go up in value). The feasting not only serves to represent an active symbol of the Renaissance for many, but also provides a sense of community among the spectators who have made reservations. Those entering the hall become special tourists with their own privileged community. This community is further concretized by the format for the event. The TRF has created an interactive murder mystery within the feast. The innkeeper and his family expect the guests to assist in solving the murder, and the person who committed the crime is among the people present at the meal. The guests must bond together as a group in order to solve the mystery by the end of the dinner.

Observing the guests in the feast hall from outside sets them apart from others and fosters a desire to participate in others. Additionally, watching the actors participate in scenarios and in other performances, such as the joust, may also foster a need to feel that the spectator can become part of the action. But interaction in these cases is limited, and spectators must find another way in which to insert themselves into the history and the community. Commerce can build the community and foster the sense of identity in this instance, providing a mode of participation that does not rely upon role assignment from the various actors. “[S]hoppers can not only realize what they are but also imagine what they might become. Identity is momentarily stabilized even while the image of a future identity begins to take shape, but the endless variation of objects means that satisfaction always remains just out of reach” (Crawford 13). The future identity manifests in the taking on of a persona, which can exhibit aspects of the new identity. Aspects of this new identity can be experimented with and applied to a future identity outside of the TRF.

Whether a person buys weapons or costumes, the behavior exhibited by the actors, or even the subject matter of the stage

performances, can influence buying patterns in the spectators. But just what is the spectator buying? The items for sale are often simplified symbols of history or culture. There are, however, some difficulties with such a practice. “In the commodification of language and culture, objects and images are torn free of their original referents and their meanings become a spectacle open to almost infinite translation. Difference ceases to threaten or to signify power relations. Otherness is sought after for its exchange value . . .” (Rutherford 11). Such a practice is all too familiar today in the usual tourist venues.

The above tendency plays directly into current consumerism. Heritage tries to bind us together through sameness—no matter how things change over time we still retain similarities in ideals. In contrast, festivals excel in the deviant and the different. “[C]apital has fallen love with difference: advertising thrives on selling us things that will enhance our uniqueness and individuality. It’s no longer about keeping up with the Joneses, it’s about being different from them” (Rutherford 11). Much of this is what fosters hostility between the host community and the performance community. In addition to attracting individuals who wish to behave differently than their usual groups, the TRF also sells things that will make them quite different from other people. Large carved walking staffs modeled after The Lord of the Rings find a market at many Renaissance festivals. Swords, garlands, armor, and bodices are all popular items that physically mark a person as distinct through their visual display. Overtly displaying these items marks a desire by some to make themselves distinct from the crowd–as “not just an average tourist.” The appeal of the Renaissance festival is difference, in particular difference from the everyday world to which we belong. Adventure, romance, and magic can happen in here but not out there—not often enough. Inside the

festival things may be experienced or purchased to achieve that differentiation.

Conclusion

Renaissance festivals do rely to varying extents on the environment to aid in the production of their performance of history. The larger festivals become, the more they need to rely upon the physical environment to transport the spectator. While interaction with the actor still remains an ideal for the venue, larger performance sites make this more and more difficult to attain. But the large environment allows the spectator to genuinely lose herself in the physical space and, by extension the history, in ways that smaller festivals cannot. The balance between actor, audience, and environment is a difficult one to achieve, but one that must be addressed in order to remain true to Patterson's ideal of connecting with the past. A detailed environment creates a community as readily as personal interaction, fostering a touristic approach to the performance. The community created by the tourism, however, is one removed from the world of the created village; they remain separated from the community of actors. Tourists, while moving freely within the native community, remain in their own community, and insertion into the narrative is difficult. The difficulty has a partial solution in the commercial nature of the physical environment.

The TRF has found that commerce can be utilized as a way of producing community within a large and perhaps somewhat impersonal environment. The scenario positions visitors as commercial tourists, and the village of New Market caters to that position within the historical narrative. The tourist community is welcomed into the history as contemporaries, but that community membership has been purchased via an entry ticket, as at other festivals. The TRF, however, as outlined in their

programs, continues to relate the history and the spectator through purchasing power. The larger festivals become the more they will likely realize and rely upon commodification as a mode of interactive performance. Such a practice, in many ways, brings the past into communion with the present. Much of our interaction within current communities is predicated on commerce and viewing the community as an economic entity.

Unfortunately, the impression given in such a performance is one that grants privilege to economic status. The visitor to the festival can purchase community in keeping with their ability to pay for that membership. Such a situation is not unlike current community difficulties where economically oppressed individuals find little or no voice in membership decisions. Identity within the community becomes predicated upon the acquisition of, or ability to acquire, items that grant identity within the community. For many people, this is not possible. The commodification of history, in many ways, places these people outside representation within the historical or fantastic continuum being represented. But, once a person has paid for the ticket, which on average costs between fifteen and twenty dollars (three to six dollars for children), the individual may decide to participate on an individual level through their imagination. In visiting the TRF, as I prepared to leave the performance, three young boys caught my attention. Costumed simply in clothes they had not purchased at the festival, they were pretending to be knights. One boy, in a long blue tunic acted as the more scholarly knight in the group, holding the map and navigating their way through the village. The second wore a tapered Robin Hood cap and held a long stick. He used it as a staff, play fighting with the third boy, who held a shorter stick with a cross guard attached to it—a play sword. They sprinkled their language with thee's and thou's before I interrupted them to ask some

questions. While someone had paid their admission—six dollars at the TRF—they could not purchase a sword, nor could they, as children, afford to participate in other commercial events, such as the feast. They did, however, build identities for themselves that did not require consumer transactions. They simply pretended—an imagination costs nothing.

While the Scarborough Faire could rely almost exclusively upon interpersonal interaction between actors and spectators to create community and offer potential identities, the size and composition of the TRF make this approach difficult. The apparent liability, however, can be turned into an advantage with a shift in the focus from the personal to the commercial. By commodifying aspects of the Renaissance for consumption, the objects and symbols can aid in creating the community. Because the areas of the TRF are broken down into pockets of specific themes, the symbols and focus on specific types of community within a larger whole. This process does not negate the importance of or need for the actors and their performances, but instead frees them of the sole responsibility for drawing the audience into play.

Community and identity can also be played out in an environment that takes both the commodification and the history to the extreme. Such is the case with the Michigan Renaissance Festival. The commercial presentation of the material goes as far as providing corporate sponsors for specific traditions such as the feast and joust. Such a practice interprets the symbols both historically and communally. In addition, they encourage history but unapologetically utilize a great deal of myth, allowing a broader range of people to participate and play with identity on their own terms, which may not match with those presented within a more traditional presentation of the Renaissance. By utilizing myth in addition to the hodge podge of history and fantasy evident at the MRF, the festival opens community even wider for individuals choosing to participate.

Endnotes

[1] I have visited the TRF three times. A bulk of the research here comes from my attendance during the 2000 season.

[2] The arrival of a heavy storm front during my visit curtailed some activities, including costume rental. The mud and moisture made even modern clothing uncomfortable, so few people seemed to be renting costumes that day.

[3] Such as with the case of the Colonial Williamsburg slave auction mentioned in the introduction, Stacy Roth provides an extensive description of and commentary on this performance in Past into Present.

[4] Of course, certain types of disorderly behavior do occur and are not tolerated at a Renaissance festival. While social conduct tends to be more outrageous than that of the world beyond the front gates, certain levels of decorum are expected and gently enforced.

Chapter Four

The Spectator with a Thousand Faces:

Myth and History within the Michigan Renaissance Festival

Introduction

To me, the Michigan Renaissance Festival, or MRF, has always been something of a home. Twelve years with them not only gave me my first taste of improvisation, but also created a sense of community I still share and has yet to be rivaled. Unfortunately, my return after five years of absence was bittersweet, coming as it did only one week after the events of September 11, 2001. While the mood for both the actors and the audience members was more subdued, I realized the importance of understanding the building of community and identity, especially in the Renaissance festival environment. For some of the people there, the MRF offered a brief means of escape from the horrible events. For others, the festival seemed to embody a possibility for confronting history.

During the opening scenario, looking at the gathered spectators, I noticed a staff member standing next to me. I asked her what she thought was special about Renaissance festivals in general, and she replied that she had the impression that people just came to drink. Watching the crowd, however, and given the sheer volume of visitors to the MRF, such an explanation avoids messier and richer possibilities. The ticket price ($14.95 at the gate) and the cost of beer (between $3.00-$6.00) at the MRF makes for a steep cover charge and some expensive alcohol, especially given the large number of local Michigan sports bars that can offer similar items at a lower cost. It also seems reductive to think that every person, or even a majority of the people, passing through the front gate has only this one goal in mind. Talking with the actors and the spectators at the MRF that day belied this simple explanation; they each had very different

reason for being there and equally different ways of connecting with the history.

The Michigan Renaissance Festival, more so than the other festivals studied in the previous chapters, has nurtured a closer relationship between history and myth. From the time of its genesis, the MRF has relied upon fictitious monarchs ruling an equally fictitious kingdom. Because of this, actor and audience alike have freely incorporated their own fantasies through the addition of non-Renaissance identities. Such elasticity has culminated in an extreme of historical amalgamation where not only do disparate points of history conjoin, but also the myth and fantasy of worlds outside that of the Renaissance. Two elements, in some ways conflicting, have resulted from this evolution of the performance. The first is an expansive and tolerant environment where there are absolutely no constraints for the taking on an identity—a person really can be anyone or anything. The second is a desire to return to a more historical and authentic paradigm for the performance. While these do not necessarily need to become mutually exclusive goals, they reflect the disagreements between proponents of heritage and history, and myth and truth.

Between these two extremes of history and pure fiction, the MRF balances a performance community capable of encompassing any number of potential identities. Here, it is possible to pull in elements of identity that are not often expressed at Renaissance festivals or living histories in general. The MRF has an emerging potential to express more socially conscious ways of looking at history; some actors already utilize the opportunity created within the more flexible history being presented. They choose to embrace their cultural identities and present their history within the framework of the MRF's performance. This exposes spectators to historical communities and identities not normally available to them.

Renaissance festivals, as seen in earlier chapters, emphasize varying elements of the performance, history, and tourism in order to aid in immersing the audience in the history. While most festivals have a great deal in common, they all choose to employ specific aspects of the performance to encourage the development of community and identity-play within the performance structure. For the Scarborough Faire, interpersonal interaction in a smaller performance environment serves to foster a closer sense of community between the actors and the audience. The Texas Renaissance Festival, due to its larger size, cannot always rely upon interaction between actors and audience. Instead, it successfully conjures the history and community through the commercial transactions of the festival. Both of these festivals shared common elements in terms of performance, history, and tourism. Their different emphasis on these elements, however, is what helps to individualize the performance at each one.

The MRF serves as an amalgam of the other festivals in this work. With this being the case, the MRF does not entire rely upon any one element to immerse the audience, as the others sometimes do. The size of this festival falls between the intimacy of the Scarborough Faire and the sprawl of the TRF. As a result, the MRF relies on both interpersonal interactions in addition to a level of commodification. Unlike the other two festivals, for many years, the MRF did not utilize historical figures in their main scenarios; most of the situations, the kingdom, and the characters were wholly fictitious. Recently, the festival has turned to the more standard use of actual history to create fictitious, but possible, situations for real historical characters. Like other Renaissance festivals, this approach to performing the history maintains a level of flexibility that can readily encompass and accommodate the expectations and needs of the spectator.

Even though the MRF attempts to create a balance between flexibility and historical accuracy, the material presented often offers up an almost purely touristic sequence of spectacles where historical traditions are created for consumers and given corporate sponsorships. Rather than a fostering of community built on commercial transactions, the commercialism seems to play to the postmodern tourist who wants to find the familiar in the foreignness of the past. While such a practice does find fault with some spectators who dislike the break with the fantasy, the more intensive interaction between the actors and the audience provides a level of compensation. Within this environment, the close-knit community of actors and artisans continues to provide a means for playing with identity. Many spectators, more than I have observed at the other festivals, feel free to dress themselves in costume, connecting with the history as they so choose regardless of the framework put forward by the MRF. While some people may feel that in order to participate at a Renaissance festival they should keep to the Renaissance, as I have witnessed at the MRF, this is not necessarily so. The comfort of the village community extends to the spectators and any characters they wish to insert into the action.

My examination of the Michigan Renaissance Festival begins with a history of the festival and a description of the performance environment. In addition to including an explanation of the framing scenario, I will also elaborate upon how smaller weekend themes work within a festival. The historical material employed by the MRF will be contextualized and examined in terms of both the symbolic material used and how authenticity is affected. This chapter also discusses how community is built here and how the use of symbols helps in the construction of identity. Because the MRF has a different relationship with its host community than do the other festivals, I take the time to examine the nature of the

conflict and how this shifts the perception of community and identity within the festival. Finally, the chapter explores the complex interaction between history, myth, and identity.

A Brief History of the MRF

The MRF began as an idea by the owner of the Texas Renaissance Festival, George Coulam, but, having decided not to live in Michigan, he sold it to James Peterson and David Pearson's brother.[1] They, in turn, gathered a staff, which was sent to several existing festivals in order to obtain a better sample of the possibilities for creating the performance. The MRF team began building its site at Columbiere Center, an extension of the University of Detroit in Clarkston, Michigan, and finally opened in 1980. After six years at this location, the MRF moved to its current site in Groveland Township between the communities of Holly and Grand Blanc.

This festival started purely as a commercial business venture to make money, which quickly became a point of contention between the two owners. Details concerning this part of the MRF history remain hazy, and many people to whom I spoke either did not know the details or did not feel at liberty to discuss them. I made repeated attempts to contact the parties concerned in order to clarify and confirm some of this information, but failed to receive an answer. For unknown reasons, David Pearson's brother dropped out of the management, and the festival operated as a private corporation under the supervision of David Pearson as site manager, with the understanding that James Peterson was a partner in the venture. The two partners eventually had a falling out and the court awarded ownership to Peterson. He continues to run the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, Kansas City Renaissance Festival, Medieval Faire (Florida), and Bay Area Renaissance Festival of Largo (Florida). David

Pearson has since moved and started the Greater Pittsburgh Renaissance Festival near Butler, Pennsylvania.

Describing the Site

The MRF is located on Dixie Highway, a main road that runs north to the cities of Grand Blanc and Flint, and south to Clarkston and the Detroit area. Of all the Renaissance festivals in this particular study, the MRF is the only one that can be clearly seen from a main road. The front gates are just visible on the other side of a vast grassy parking area. In addition to this area, a shuttle bus runs from the Mt. Holly Ski Area parking lot, about two to three miles down the road, to the MRF gates. Coming in from the airport, I noticed that the MRF now has large digital signs, the same type used by road construction, on the highway approaching the festival. The signs give the dates, times, and weekend theme information for the performance season, in addition to providing parking information to the visitor. Such an elaborate method for giving information is required due to the location of the festival. The traffic in the area can block the main road and, because the area is largely residential, it is sometimes difficult for local homeowners in the area to come and go on the weekends—one of the conflicts between the festival and the host community.

The actual site covers approximately twenty-three acres and is physically structured in a manner similar to the TRF. While not as large, the MRF is enclosed by a wall with a natural boundary of woods and wetland on the southern edge. The MRF has been expanding, primarily north and westward, adding shops and stages, in addition to some internal building within the older portions of the site. The new structures add to the existing islands of shops and food booths. Approximately one hundred fifty actors and roughly fifty interns participating in the educational

programs offered by the entertainment area of the MRF cover the site. The festival runs for a total of fifteen days over a period of seven weeks, entertaining an average of 17,000 people per day (Land interview).

Scripting the Framing Scenario

Typically, the visitor can find a description of the framing scenario inside the program. This has been the case in the past at the MRF. When I received my program, I felt some surprise at not seeing any description of the history being presented within the program. In the past, this has not been the case. The MRF has usually refrained from utilizing a specific date, geographical point, and actual history. Instead, the performance has relied upon a fantasy history that implies England and the Renaissance without specifically stating these as the setting; the costumes, buildings, and character accents have been enough to evoke them. In addition, a brief history of the village, named Hollygrove[2], and its association with the monarchs whose visit is celebrated each year. These rulers have, traditionally, been fictitious. Within the last few years, however, the MRF has changed over to a representation of Elizabethan England in more specific ways.

Because I needed the information in addition to being curious, I sought out one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting to explain the format and context of the performance to me. According to her, the year is 1564. Mary, Queen of Scotland, and Elizabeth I have come together to sign a peace treaty between Scotland and England. The members of the court have come to Hollygrove to celebrate this. In addition, the villagers are celebrating a harvest festival where "everyone from the lowest peasant to the highest noble can feast and have fun" (Brown interview). Having seen "wanted" posters for Robin Hood posted on nearby trees, I also asked how this character works within the scenario. She replied that he is new this

year, but that the narrative used within the performance mirrors the story with which everyone is familiar.

> We have Robin Hood versus the Sheriff of Hollygrove. We have a Maid Marion, and at the beginning of the festival during the day, Robin is a criminal. He runs in, and it's made to look like he's a criminal. The Sheriff of Hollygrove and Guy of Gisbourne say he is. Later in the day, during the human chess match, we find out that he isn't a criminal. Robin has his merry men; then he and Marion get married. (Brown interview)

Glancing through the program, I noted that a majority of the character names affiliated with the Robin Hood scenario come from a cable series created by Granada Productions, a British producer, for the Showtime television network. The scenario and these characters bear a striking resemblance to the series, most notably the use of the character Guy of Gisbourne. The MRF integrates a great deal of popular culture references and materials, more so than the other festivals studied here. In addition to the material for Robin Hood, the MRF has also utilized the popularity of Gladiator, as described in the introduction. These smaller popular culture references provide the core performance framework rather than reliance upon a larger theme and scenario, which accommodates the smaller ones.

The MRF's lack of an overtly stated large scenario has both benefits and drawbacks. Admittedly, I did witness the opening scenario, and so my understanding of the larger performance continued to incorporate this information. There were, however, few performative reminders of the morning's actions. Even though this happened to be the case, the lack of a scenario outline would not have particularly affected the way in which I viewed the performance. Like many others, I could have gleaned the necessary information from observation of the characters. The actress portraying Elizabeth I has gone to great lengths to look as much

like the historical person as possible. The program contains a listing of the characters, which gives the spectator a good idea of their temporal location via the historical names. If the people do not come to the opening ceremony, however, they can be left somewhat confused as to why the monarchs are present. As for the presence of Robin Hood, they would only gather this information at the Chess Match, too late in the day to really understand the plot, or through a few tattered “wanted” posters tacked to trees throughout the village. With the ignorance of an actual date or circumstances, however, comes the flexibility for the performance to reflect whatever the spectator needs. Not having a date also allows for the often criticized practice of incorporating larger periods of history and presenting them within the same performance.

While such a practice allows some spectators to connect with the history on their own terms and for their own purposes, other spectators now have a more specific reason to interact with the characters they meet—to gather information. Having a specific purpose behind an encounter makes it easier for the spectator to approach the actor. I wanted and needed to know the scenario details, albeit for research purposes, and as a result, intentionally sought out an individual who would know it. My choice had to be asking a member of the community; it did not necessarily have to be a member of the royal court. The circumstances provided me with a reason for discovering more information concerning the community—an act of sharing that offered me a chance of understanding the working of that same community. Ignorance of the narrative can create an opportunity for the interpersonal interactions that can incorporate someone into the community. Now, knowing the scenario can make the spectator someone special—a community insider.

Unfortunately, there can also be drawbacks to the lack of information concerning the scenario. While some spectators may be

encouraged to inquire about the framework, many others may not. This may leave them in a kind of performative limbo; they do not necessarily understand who these characters are and what they are doing here. As George Coulam found in creating the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, some spectators require anchor points in order stave off feelings of intimidation within a large immersive performance. In this respect, the scenario often serves as a kind of roadmap for their expectations. Not all spectators visiting during the course of the day, however, will have witnessed the opening scenario. For these people, program information helps them to "catch up" on the narrative they may have missed.

Regardless of whether the scenario is available to the spectator or not, the more recent turn to history has sparked a different mode of performance for the MRF. While I performed there for twelve years, actual historical events remained somewhat peripheral to the performance. Historical characters were sometimes used or spoofed for the enjoyment of the audience. Within the last five years, however, the MRF has been slowly moving toward a more historical and historically accurate depiction of the Renaissance. One of the proponents of this change is Jessica Land, currently assistant entertainment director for the MRF.[3] Her parents are longstanding craftspeople at the MRF, and Land has participated in the community for twelve years. She has professional experience in teaching living history techniques and wishes to apply this expertise to the material at the MRF. Part of this will include the addition of an internship program in living history.

Discontinued in 1999 and revived in 2001, the Academy, an educational program in acting for the MRF, offered workshops and classes in costuming, characterization, history, and improvisation. The program served in the creation of learning opportunities for area youth interested in acting at the festival. In order to implement this new direction in the

performance, Land intends to revive the Academy in a different form. Several years ago, when the MRF moved from the old site at Colombiere, it began the Academy as a way to train young actors in the methods needs for immersive performance. I myself graduated from this Academy and eventually served as an Academy director for the apprentices.

At the height of the program, there were approximately twenty to thirty students. These students were split into two groups: apprentices and journeymen. The apprentices were usually first-year students, often from area high schools and colleges, who had never performed at the MRF. Journeymen were usually second-year students who received more advanced workshops and focused upon how to work with the audience at the MRF. Such techniques included how to approach a spectator, how to identify which spectators would be more likely to accept an approach by an actor, and how to engage the spectator as a fellow community member.

Land's project will have a similar structure focusing on the techniques required in presenting living history. The program will only focus on first-year actors at the festival, who tend to be high school and college students. She proposes a group of lectures specifically focusing on the techniques involved in living history. The participants in this program will then add themselves to the cast, but their activities will be viewed as a kind of internship. The students involved will be responsible for doing thorough research on their chosen character. A teacher within their school will guide this research while the festival gives them the necessary dramatic techniques. While under the teacher's guidance, students must create their own scripts.

Land would eventually like to build a larger school project, like that at Scarborough Faire, but the complexity of some of the contracts at the MRF, in addition to the size of the festival, make this difficult. As mentioned in the introduction, there are different types of performers—

national and resident cast—involved in the performance as well as craftspeople. Most contracts only cover the weekends of the performance season, and some people can only work on those days. Many resident cast members and a majority of the craftspeople come from local communities and hold other jobs during the work week. Compounding this problem is the fact that many of the resident cast members who work at the MRF are paid very little or, often, nothing at all. The fact that the local actors love the opportunity to participate serves as the driving force for being there and not the monetary compensation. In addition to the logistical problems of scheduling the actors, the size of the MRF also serves as a disadvantage. The Scarborough Faire, because it is smaller, can cordon off portions of the festival effectively. This means that the entire faire does not need to be in operation for School Days and its activities. The size and design of the MRF makes this much harder because of the locations of the feast hall, front gate, and tournament field, which are far away from one another along the narrow stretch of the village.

The new direction, utilizing a more overt living history approach to the performance, proposed by the current assistant entertainment director has the possibility of moving the performance toward a greater feeling of community involvement. The living history format, however, could also potentially jeopardize the effectiveness of community building and identity-play within the MRF. Such a move risks the loss of narrative flexibility and could fall into a purely lecture-based format relegating visitors to being temporal tourists, as they are at Colonial Williamsburg, which may exclude or prescribe historical identity for some. How the use of living history will affect the performance of the MRF remains to be seen.

Weekend Scenarios

In addition to the main framing scenario, the MRF has smaller themes in place for each weekend. These weekend scenarios offer an opportunity for people to explore and experience their expectations of the symbolic themes of the Renaissance. The MRF has some weekend themes in common with other festivals, but they also tender a variety of more global offerings. The common themes, as with other Renaissance festivals, specifically play to a romanticized notion of Renaissance history with subjects such as Renaissance Romance, Legends and Lore, and High Seas Adventure. While the festival focuses on popular conceptions of the Renaissance and Elizabethan England, the MRF also includes Scottish and Irish weekends. Both of these adhere to audience expectations of the period; people often come in kilts and tartans, and the largest performance draw is their hosting of the North American Caber Tossing Championship. While the MRF certainly utilizes most people's familiarity with British ethnicity and symbols, they do not exclude other cultures and histories from the narrative frame of the festival. In fact they set aside special opportunities for these to be aired.

To this end, the MRF offers Wonders of the World Weekend where the billing for the public states that "Join us in a celebration of the marvels of the new and ancient worlds! Dancers from Holland, Africa, China and the America's [sic] expand Hollygrove's borders." (Program 2000). The program also lists, as members of the performance cast, a Native American music ensemble. While these depictions of the various cultures do rely to an extent upon stereotypes, the fact that they are offered at all is unusual. The MRF has cultivated a relationship with the International Institute of Detroit, which specifically recruits performers occupying different cultures and histories. By even giving voice to these possibilities, the MRF creates inclusive historical and cultural possibilities that people might not experience in an immersive heritage site. Such a

practice grants spectators the opportunity to experience and enter into cultures and histories that are not necessarily their own.

During the time that I visited the MRF, it was Renaissance Romance weekend, where the theme focuses on notions of chivalry and romance. The spectators have special games and events arranged for their participation such as The Courting Game, Romancing the Stone, Wooing Contest, and Romeo and Juliet Auditions. The first two are primarily for single audience members. In each of these, spectators attempt to match up with other spectators in the manner of a blind date. The Courting Game operates on the same principle as the television program The Dating Game, using Renaissance themed questions. Romancing the Stone, however, requires more effort on the part of the spectator. A man or woman wishing to participate receives a stone with a number on it at the front gate. During the day, they must try to match their number with another spectator. Should they do so, they win a prize. Often the actors also participate, since it offers an opportunity to interact with people. The Wooing Contest is hosted by a small faction of the royal court, the Vulgarians. They instruct spectators, chosen from the audience, in the art of "wooing." Winners, again, receive a prize. Finally, the Romeo and Juliet auditions are just that—auditions for the play. Hosted by an actor playing William Shakespeare, members of the audience are chosen to vie for the title roles by performing the balcony scene from the play.

By far, the most prevalent activity during this weekend is the conducting of marriage ceremonies. Many couples outside the Renaissance festival community chose to have their weddings at the festival. The MRF devotes an entire area to planning these events and other group activities for the people who wish to have them. The guests receive a discounted group price, and the couple can be married in the gazebo with a reception either under a tent or in the castle feast hall. The

wedding itself is quite visible, turning what is normally considered a private ceremony into a public performance. I stopped at the Queen's Garden, a small landscaped area containing the gazebo, to watch one ceremony. The bride, groom, and most of their guests dressed in Elizabethan or medieval costume. As the ceremony began, more and more spectators gathered to witness the ceremony. By the time the bride and groom said "I do," a fairly large crowd of people had assembled and cheered as they were pronounced man and wife. The couple seemed surprised and embarrassed, yet pleased that their nuptials had attracted such a large crowd of people.

Contextualizing the History

While the MRF wishes to initiate a new direction toward living history, its performance already misses the mark by including such a large variety of Renaissance history. Their very opening places two contemporary monarchs together. Yes, Elizabeth and Mary certainly knew of one another and were engaged in a high level of political jousting; however, they never met—even while Mary was imprisoned. Though there are deviations from the historical within the MRF, they still retain aspects of histories that are more prevalent for the Michigan region. They do so through the blending of the historical with the popular imagination, giving the audience the opportunity to connect with the performance in a larger number of ways, blending fantasy and history into something meaningful for the individual.

After my conversation with one of the Queen's ladies, I continued to simply roam the village. In doing so, I saw barbarian Vikings wandering the same streets as Elizabethan courtiers. I could not tell if one such person wore the medallion designating him as an employee. In the past, when I was employed as an actress, a large group of individuals all

dressed as Vikings would come at least once during the run of the performance. Their group contained around ten to twelve people who would by in large stay together in their group and play out a scenario on their own. The gentleman I observed, whether he was an employee or not, thoroughly enjoyed playing the Viking. Dressed in leather breeches, furred boots, scraps of chain mail, and a truly magnificent horned helmet, he went out of his way to speak with people or simply wave. The lack of a readily available and given scenario for the spectator allows for and encourages the audience, and some actors, to lump together material from several different histories. In Michigan, heavily settled by Scandinavians and Germans, this includes Viking and Germanic historical materials. Regardless of whether or not the gentleman worked at the MRF or was only an audience member, the Viking man, while not historically accurate, nevertheless made a personal connection to the past and as a result inserted himself into a community that otherwise may have been closed.

Such a lumping together of historical materials is indicative of and common to heritage and heritage sites (Lowenthal, Heritage 137). There is, according to some, a certain danger in such a practice; this tendency can cause people to "mask diversity and collapse countless earlier images into a few dominant memories, accentuating any impressive characteristic and exaggerating its splendor or fragility" (Lowenthal, Past 208). That this can occur, in certain circumstances, there is no doubt. The nature of performance makes this practice necessary, such as a presentation of the joust. The village must look like and present the Renaissance, without key symbols—often splendid—the audience would not necessarily "read" the performance or the environment as being associated with a particular history. But reliance on specific characteristics, exaggerated or not, does not always have to exclude diversity. Instead of masking diversity, the fictional narrative and lack of dates at the MRF—something that can be

said to lump history together—contains an extraordinary ability to insert anyone into the narrative. They have the option of connecting with the history itself or with the mythic archetypes conjured by the history.

The hodge-podge of historic periods presented at the MRF actively encourages the usage of myth. Making sense of the wide variety of material present can be difficult, especially when it comes to tying the historical narrative together. This problem can be countered by using myth and symbol in its presentation. Robin Hood is a more visible part of what occurs on a more personal level for some of the spectators. Although Robin Hood has some historical basis and is literally a white European male, what he represents—the myth—can be accessed regardless of social groupings or categories. His essence speaks to standing up for the oppressed, even at the expense of one's own good, and in the MRF scenario, persevering through misunderstanding. He is thought to be a thief through the efforts of others, but the truth comes out in the end. Barthes has made note that "In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences . . ." (Barthes 143). But such a process is tricky to negotiate when applied to Renaissance festivals, because of the individual associations with such mythic essences. A community can usually agree upon the essences of history, however, within such a performance in way that they cannot outside the venue. Agreements like discovery, magic, adventure, et cetera are validated and accepted as a part of the performance experience. Surrounded by these agreements, the spectator is welcomed and encouraged to make meanings and experiences. But the connection with these essences remains a personal one.

What must be kept in mind is that the purpose of the MRF is not to explain the complexities of history, nor is it the purpose or responsibility of Renaissance festivals in general. Rather, if their main purpose is to

create a safe place for identity-play and for community, then it is necessary for the Renaissance festival to utilize the simplicity of essences and ideals. That is not to say that the complexity of human acts is ignored, quite the contrary. What is presented at the MRF is neither an oral or written history, but instead a series of embodied performances of history where there is a great deal of interaction between people. The complexity of human actions cannot really be escaped in this particular instance. In fact, we can be confronted by it. Actors at the MRF are trained to make personal connections with the spectators and to encourage them to participate. In doing so, the audience consciously and unconsciously expresses their connections to this myth; fantasy simply aids in this process. As a result, the performance of the spectators at the MRF contains the possibility to contradict the essences of myth within the performed community, potentially calling our assumptions into question.

Though the MRF may not yet openly question the way in which the audience perceives or connects with myth, its reliance upon the essences of a complex and rich history is still necessary. The MRF must create an immediate impression in order for the audience to associate the performance environment with the Renaissance. If they cannot, then the visitor's expectations fail to be met. Because they do not rely upon a systematic and sequential text in creating a presentation of the past, a usage of high-impact mythic symbols is a necessity. Myths aid in the presentation not only through the accessibility of a fictional past, but also in bypassing extensive knowledge of the past on the part of the spectator. "[M]yth essentially aims at causing an immediate impression—it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations which my later belie it" (Barthes 130). The reliance upon myth and mythic symbols acts as a short

cut—an immediate impression—in evoking the history for the audience. The knights performing at the MRF offer an example of this activity.

Historically speaking, knights, while culled from noble families, did not necessarily always conduct themselves with chivalry, as myth would have us believe. These men were capable of crass, shocking, and violent behavior, but a past based on a Victorian interpretation of Arthurian legend gives us a very different set of impressions and expectations. The MRF is no exception. The actual knights, under the helms on the jousting field, live a very different life than the one they perform. I went backstage to interview them between jousts and asked them a few questions. With me, the knights acted brashly and enjoyed trying to shock me with their language and antics; most people in the audience never see this behavior. Once in armor, or even in just mentioning their job description, however, these men become paragons of courage and virtue for the audience. Their personalities do not actually change, although they tend to clean up their language during the show, but the audience views them differently than they might if they were to see these men in the local grocery store.

Symbolizing the Renaissance

The MRF, in attempting to capitalize upon secondary media associations of the past, such as those in film and television, regularly takes advantage of the blending of historical periods into an indistinct past. In some cases, like that of the Viking mentioned earlier, the practice is highly inclusive. Even the stage shows that incorporate material from the present into a historically themed performance often do so as a means to encourage audience participation. Some recognition of the present within the past allows the audience to feel smart; they feel “in” on the jokes and references. As a result, these practices can strengthen aspects of

community for the spectator as tourist. As used in the Ded Bob Sho, performed at the MRF as well as the TRF, and the other stage shows, such interruptions disrupt the time period, but in doing so, they offer the audience the opportunity to recognize themselves even as they play visitors from another village in the same historical continuum.

The MRF, however, also creates performances based on popular media that do not use references to the present time. Instead, they attempt to mesh wholly disparate histories. While individuals may do this, they do so in order to make a personal connection to the Renaissance being depicted. Other examples of lifting material from secondary sources work well with the depicted history. The MRF utilizes Shakespeare in Love to create another performance. In the film, a minor reference is made to the young Shakespeare's newest play, which he intends to call Romeo and Ethyl the Pirate's Daughter. The festival season following the film saw the MRF utilizing not only the names of Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe as characters, but also saw the usage of Ethyl the Pirate's Daughter as a performance. The fiction of the MRF not only allows these performances to exist, but also creates an inside joke for those people who saw the film. Ultimately, the creation of history at the MRF comes down to repeat business rather than the ethical or moral concerns of presenting authentic history or fantastic myth.

But in taking this short cut and using myth to make an immediate impression for the audience, the choices made at the MRF are for the spectacular and the immediate without conscious ethical or moral value judgment placed upon the material. It has chosen to evoke the period and to generate interest in the performance, which will eventually mean more money. As with many Renaissance festivals, profit becomes the bottom line, rather than a particular political or historical agenda. The question asked is: What will sell? Since this is a performance, the touristic nature of

the environment begs for and receives temporal and historical slippage. The audience loves seeing through the myth; it is fun and makes the audience feel smart. The rational, extensive, and historically accurate explanations might actually alienate the audience, since those aspects may not meet touristic expectations of the experience.

Myth at the MRF also becomes co-opted in the process of building correlations between the past and the present, glomming symbolic association onto brand names. The MRF makes overt and predominant use of sponsors and sponsor names in specific performances and event offerings. The joust boasts the Coor's Light Knight; a local vineyard sponsors a wine tasting event; National Coney Island sponsors the High Seas Adventure weekend; Pepsi sponsors the Press-a-Wench competition on Renaissance Romance weekend; and Lego covers a castle building contest for children. The local federal credit union gives out eye patches on pirate weekend. Sponsors, like the spectators, attempt to affiliate themselves with large spectacular aspects of the history in order to take on those attributes seen as most positive. In doing so, they offer a dominant reading of the historical material for the spectator. Whether or not the spectator chooses to agree with, subvert, or ignore this reading, an individual cannot help but take in the associations being made between the past and the present. The Coors Light Knight becomes both a mythic historical figure resembling a football superstar. The beer becomes the bridge in the reading of audience as sports fans, making an association between the past and its views of the joust and our present views of football or other sporting events. The association may not be accurate or remotely correct, but the usage of myth and symbol makes authenticity and accuracy immaterial in this instance.

While the TRF uses the commerce to assist in the creation of the environment, the MRF actually manages to take commerce to a level of

distraction. In addition to sponsor banners, there is a high profile for the obvious ATMs scattered around the festival grounds. Labeled Ye Olde ATM, there is a tongue in cheek effort to make these very modern devices seem like a part of the Renaissance décor. When they were first installed, they were programmed with old style English prompts such as “Insert ye card.” They no longer do this, likely due to servicing and programming expenses. But this, along with the usage of Lady Visa and Master Card, operates much in the same way as modern conveniences for the tourists in foreign countries. They have left home without leaving the conveniences of home. Because of this, the past does not quite become a foreign place. One can still use plastic to pay for goods while sipping a half-caff mochaccino latte.

Authenticity and Symbol

The use of such symbols and their subsequent association with romance and myth can enhance the events and the environment, allowing for a departure from historical accuracy and an opening for alternative readings. At the MRF, or any other Renaissance festival, the visitor does not necessarily have to adhere to history. In fact, many people choose not to. Myth offers a way to subvert notions of history without having to present historically accurate alternatives. The choice of the myths and symbols used influences the possibilities for alternative readings of history. Often these choices evoking the historical period do so to the exclusion of all other material. This leads to a quandary in dealing with history at such a venue. The production staff must obviously make determinations about what they wish to present about the past and how.

Usually, the material chosen to represent the Renaissance tends to be more colorful, exciting, and sensational. These choices influence the way in which the history is viewed, interpreted, and reinforced. “What

images of the past will survive? Can the dynamic nature of the past be presented under such circumstances?" (Mills 75). These questions are important ones, and the answers can be determined, in part, by examining the purpose of the performance. Some of the images of the past that survive obviously play into the ideas of myth; they are signifiers and forms of something more difficult to express and have an evocative power for a large number of people. The act of fantasy and play within an historical context allows the performance to meet the expectations and desires of each person. Without the ability to bend history through play, it may not always be possible to meet these demands, and some tourists may not satisfy their particular needs through the experience offered. The more flexibility and fantasy provided by the Renaissance festival, however, gives the spectator a familiar foreignness capable of encompassing different types of touristic desire.

The creation of history, or the act of making an amalgam of the past, walks a fine line between inclusion in the narrative and complete touristic spectacle. That does not mean, however, that the invention of history and tradition at the MRF is negative. The fantastic nature of history usage under these circumstances allows that the creation of traditions, and in some cases history, will be easier. In fact, such a practice creates more possibilities in adding in traditions and history that can incorporate a larger number of people and their possible expectations.

Whether the performance at the MRF depicts an authentic history or predominantly relies upon myth, what ties the two together is a need to make a personal connection with the material and a desire to have the past be present. "If there is a unifying thread to these exercises in historical reconstruction it is the quest for immediacy, the search for a past which is palpably and visibly present" (Samuel 175). People need this in order to construct community and identities and to relate to the constructed

communities and identities of others. Reconstruction, whether for educational or entertainment purposes, requires a sense of immediacy for the audience to understand how communities and identities are built from this material. But how do you make the past present for people? In the case of the Renaissance festival, the sense of the past's presence is higher when people do not merely watch the performance but actually become personally involved in its presentation. This gives the sense of excitement and immediacy they often claim as lacking in their own lives. By making a live action version of the past, one can make history palpably present by allowing the person to participate and build a relationship with it. Along with this comes the possibility for creating community. People become part of a community when they are both present and participating members of it. The MRF's flexible usage of history and myth aids in creating a strong sense of community among its members and among the many audience members who chose to participate in the performance.

It can be argued that such a practice distorts history; and, within the confines of a living history, as Land proposes, this would certainly be a concern, since their primary purpose is to educate the public. The purpose of the Renaissance festival, however, has long since changed from providing education to providing entertainment with the potential for more shifts in the production's purpose. At the Scarborough Faire, the main purpose is not to present history as it happened but to present a performance that invites the play of identity. This being the case, insertion of romantic myth becomes a benefit and not a liability. "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (Barthes 143). Myth can disrupt history and oversimplify historic fact or fiction, substituting one for the other. Renaissance festivals all adhere to a process of historical

conversion; the use of history adds to the larger picture, but the actual content of the performance blends heritage and myth largely because myth can make unknown situations feel safe and entertaining.

While the Renaissance festival may not be viewed as an authentic representation of history, it does manifest an opportunity to search for the more authentic self that might not find expression in the world outside the performance. “Striving for selfhood is intertwined with the attempt to locate or articulate a more authentic experience” (Bendix 18). What a person wants from authenticity within the performance of a history or heritage is a confirmation of the ephemeral experience or the cultural artifact. It validates what was thought to have happened. Such a validation is vital to the community and to the individual in terms of identity. To find that the experience or the artifact was somehow faulty or false could potentially cause a monumental shift in how people conceive of themselves and the communities they occupy. Such was the case during the Renaissance with the surge in scientific discovery and humanist thought. The results of these activities resulted in enormous shifts in the world view; shifts which many of the people were ill prepared to absorb and understand.

Community

Unlike my visits to the Scarborough Faire and the TRF, at the MRF I have never been a spectator—always a member of the inside community. As such, I was able to walk into the festival prior to the opening of the front gates. Being present within the site before the performance begins helps one really see and understand the MRF as a community unto itself. While walking through the site, a number of people I have not seen for several years greet me, welcoming me back as if I had never left. This sense of continuity is characteristic of nearly all festivals,

especially among members of the resident cast. While the other two festivals conceded membership within the acting community to me due to my experience at the MRF, here I am viewed as member of the company and sometimes referred to as Isabella Borgia, my past character in the village.

As my ramble through the MRF prior to opening emphasized that the communities at the MRF break down into the same areas as those at other festivals. There is a series of internal groups that include crafters, actors, and other festival employees. Outside the gates, the spectators comprise their own community. This community allegiance on the part of the spectator may change as they actively decide to participate in the performance. I observed that at the MRF more spectators decide to participate more overtly in the performance by donning costumes or parts of costumes and attempting to change their verbal patterns to include manners of Renaissance speech.

One of the ways a person might begin to cross over into the village as a character might come from participating in one of the many stage shows. The best example for turning a group of disparate spectators into a small community would be the Shakespeare spoofs of Missed-a-Piece theatre. This group of actors played for several years at the MRF utilizing the work of Clark Orwick of the Ded Bob Sho. He wrote Shakespearean spoofs for this group of actors, and included titles such as: How Macbeth Lost All His Friends, The Messy Horrible Mass Stabbing and Bloody Death of Julius Caesar, and The Rotten Luck and Really Bad Timing of Romeo and Juliet. Each show follows a similar format. The audience as a whole is given a role to play, and one member of the audience is brought on stage to play a role with the actors. In Romeo and Juliet, the audience is divided into Montagues and Capulets, and the actors rehearse them, as a part of the pre-show, to boo one another throughout the play. In Julius

Caesar, while the remaining audience serves as Roman citizens, and one audience member is chosen to play the title character, whose only line is "Et tu Brutae?" The sense of belonging to a community is fostered by the actors, who give them an identity within a limited community.

The activity generated by the interactive nature of the stage show accomplishes several tasks. First, it presents history as a participatory in nature. The audience is shown that the performance, while entertaining and capable of moving along without them, benefits from the efforts of the spectators who insert themselves into it. Everyone has a great deal of fun. Second, the Renaissance is often summed up in the work of Shakespeare. Such symbolism is also tied up with and appropriated by notions of high culture as opposed to low or pop culture. The actors of Missed-A-Piece bring the reality of the history back to the people. Shakespeare and the Globe were originally beloved by the lower classes and merchants of London. Though he eventually played for English Royalty, his plays were relegated to Southwark, where the less savory aspects of English society resided. Bear baiting, prostitution, and theatres, among other pastimes, were situated here. This particular performance presents Shakespeare as of, by, and for the people in contrast to the more formal view that the public may have. Third, the actors begin to initiate the spectators into the community of the MRF.

Community membership here, as at the Scarborough, is assigned through interpersonal exchanges between actor and audience member as well as the spectator's open desire to participate. Many people attending the MRF learn to participate in smaller community groups that form around specific stage performances. This activity serves as an example of how an audience member might go about inserting herself into the narrative particularly in terms of how to behave. The specially chosen audience member, however, serves a dual purpose. Not only does this

person display the more minute specifics of how to engage in identity-play, he also carries with him the audience's desire for him to succeed next to the actors. They want one of their community members to conduct himself well among the members of another community—that of the entertainers.

With performance as the primary mode for interaction between audience and actors, the creation of the community within the MRF relies upon a malleable perception of what constitutes community. Because the dynamics of the performance creates new group affiliations, as seen in the methods of Missed-A-Piece, there is the potential to examine social issues outside the festival from new perspectives. "By combining with others in a group, I can find support to resist those negative social projections which reduce my freedom to function as a citizen" (Johnston 7). By reconstituting group affiliations through interactive performances, new group bonds can form. Within these new bonds the individual can resist negative social projections by exerting a new identity within the performance, one which expresses who they feel they are or how they wish to be seen.

While the communities present at the MRF are similar to those found at the Scarborough Faire and the TRF, the level of audience participation, however, appears higher, as evidenced by the number of spectators dressing in costume and playing out characters. Such a practice blurs the firm lines between actor and audience but does not seem to affect the role of tourist. The people participating maintain their own community as characters from outside the village. Through this interaction, the usual social lines and group identification can potentially be redrawn. Usually, "[a] social group can be defined as two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or . . . perceive themselves to be members of the same social category" (Turner 15). MRF upends this by

allowing people to reorganize common social identification. Instead of reinforcing identities and groups, the performance at the MRF has the potential to show just how random some of this thinking happens to be. Group becomes malleable in terms of individual association, as can be seen in the types of identities created by individual spectators.

In making group affiliation more elastic, new communities can potentially form outside the usual lines of social categorization. People are free to rearrange their relationship with groups as they so choose, illustrating that the situation can change the nature of the encounter. The performative and immersive nature of the environment allows the spectator to do this by empowering people with the ability to display themselves as they feel they truly are or as they wish to be seen. This signals a new format and possibility for interaction that might not be available in the everyday world outside the festival.

Performance at the MRF also allows groups to redefine social categories. This redefinition certainly can be based on pre-existing classifications; certainly no one forces the spectator to play. But these groupings can be completely redrawn based on new individual perceptions. In doing so, they potentially begin to lose meaning. For instance, if an executive chooses to play a beggar, then the executive has traded one perception of a category—rich versus poor, upper versus lower class—for another rather than developing something new. Categories may be subverted, however, such as the case of the female squire at Scarborough Faire. At the MRF, these classifications can also be based on and influenced by the depiction of myth. The individual's group association can be relegated to a secondary position replaced by an affiliation with a romantic perception of the history, frequently embodied by myth and mythic archetypes—often used in the advertising material for the MRF and other festivals.

Symbols and Identities

As at other Renaissance festivals, the MRF relies upon the symbol of the knight to evoke the history and the mythic notions of the Renaissance necessary in their advertisements. Similar to the use of the faceless knight at the Scarborough Faire, the knight at the MRF seems to offer a category-less social grouping and identity. All of the MRF programs for the last four years have used a knight motif in the cover art. The image appeals to the audience's expectations of the traditional knight with full ornate plate armor, helm, shield, and sword. Like the Scarborough Faire program, the face of the MRF's knight is covered by the helm, evoking a sense of mystery concerning his identity and allowing visitors to see the knight as a potential manifestation of their own identity. The wording around the knight image plays to the sense of adventure he engenders: "Amazing Days, Wild Knights!" "Live the Legend!" "Relive the Days of Knights." All of these statements directly relate to a romantic view of the Renaissance, and in particular, the sense of the extraordinary that awaits the visitor. Such an experience appears to be guaranteed through the usage of words like 'legend' and 'wild.' These notions concerning the knight certainly come from media influences about the life of knights and the romance that accompanies them. Films like First Knight, A Knight's Tale, and Excalibur aid in constructing the audience's expectations of what a knight is and the times in which they live. But by keeping this image faceless, both the Scarborough Faire and the MRF open its potential identity with which a wider variety of people may associate regardless of more conventional social categorizations concerning identity.

After having watched the joust, standing in the pavilion looking out over the grass, I saw a very small boy, maybe five or six years old, in a

silver cape and helmet, carrying a wooden sword and shield. I called out to him and his mother, asking permission for a photo. He immediately threw both arms in the air in an imitation of having vanquished some imaginary foe. At that moment, I saw someone young and small becoming empowered through role playing. As a knight, he had courage and agency; there was nothing that he could not do. Even the little girls may play knights. One of the pre-shows at the MRF joust involves local horsewomen putting on a show of their skills. While this does not include any full contact jousting, it does display a strong, skilled, and physical role for women. In addition, the same shop where the little boy obtained his sword and shield also stocks the same material geared toward little girls. The shop displays several shields that are decorated with a variety of symbols: griffins, dragons, knights. One shield, however, is extremely different; it bears a picture of a maiden next to a unicorn. Such a symbol is unlikely to appeal to the average little boy, but little girls with a love of horses, especially unicorns, would be far more likely to be attracted to the item.

Through these images and the myths that surround them, the MRF and other festivals allow people to redefine themselves. Individuals can break away from what confines and defines them within the everyday social structure. Some people may find that history, especially at heritage sites, operates in the same way to classify their community and identity. Heritage often works to characterize group identity; in fact, it sometimes reaffirms marginality even as it proposes to confirm belonging. While Williamsburg represents an American heritage, the history shown reinforces the historical legacy of others who were marginalized. Their place within the environment is prescribed for them, and without fantasy and myth, the spectator has no flexibility within the narrative. “The process of bonding with others happens in this way: if I feel marginalized

within society, my position is relatively weak because I've accepted that what defines me . . . acts as a break on the social participation I can achieve, which others enjoy as a matter of course" (Johnston 7). At the MRF, a person has a choice as to whether she wishes to accept what defines them. If she chooses she may break with this, redefine herself, and participate in the community within this new persona. In this way, bonding within the community can occur at several levels without the conventional constraints placed on the individual by society. In addressing the relationship between the actor and the spectator, the bonding is ideally one of empowerment. The spectator has the ability to take on an identity within that history regardless of past or present identity or group categorization. This interaction and performative exchange provides the flexibility of community and identity capable of overcoming and exploring the possibilities in building community and identity.

Conjoined aspects of history and myth can allow for this flexibility to occur. As a result, community ceases to be as cut and dry as it might seem. Is the woman playing a wench a feminist, a Democrat, a Republican, a homemaker? She might just be all or none of the above. In addition, the blustering courtier might be the shy programmer in the cubicle next to yours, or he might be some football watching, belching guy that you know from across the street. The fop might be straight, the knight might be gay. In donning these identities, people come to occupy different communities at will. They, in part, eschew for a period of time the social teaching that encourages individuals "to identify with an abstract, mythically rooted community of people 'of the same kind'" (Eriksen 61). Instead, they organize community based on other aspects of group or individual identity. Some of this organization may be culled from the mythic archetypes aroused by the history and its symbols. Rather than participating in the literal history of the performance, people might choose

to make affiliations with more abstract associations such as chivalry, courage, or discovery.

Community Boundaries in Conflict

Like other festivals in the United States, the transitory nature of the limited performance causes suspicion in the more established host community. The host communities often see the performers and craftspeople as a threat to the stability of the surrounding area. Coulam ran into numerous difficulties with his first festival in Utah because of differences in the perception of the host community and the performance community. The MRF is no exception.

The host community of Holly has been in on again off again conflict with the MRF. During the 2000-2001 season, local residents voiced louder objections to the festival. Ostensibly, the difficulties centered on three main components: parking, security, and living spaces on the site. Residents complained about the parking and the security. The volume of cars was handled with alternate parking and traffic personnel, which worked fairly well. The security problem involved the locals and their perception of festival workers as people from whom they needed to be protected. The stereotype of the Renaissance festival employee does not really sound all that different from the usual characterization of vagrants thought of by the general public. While the residents did not feel that security was enough, the festival did employ several state officers and sheriffs for the festival both inside and outside of the fair itself. Kathy Parker, the site coordinator, made many improvements in 2001 that addressed the problems.

The largest trouble centered on whether or not the shopkeepers could legally reside above their shops. The township cited fire code enforcement as the difficulty. The shops are largely open wood

constructions, which according to Deputy Chief Doug Smith of the North Oakland County Fire Authority, “did not meet the township’s building codes for human habitation” (Community Herald 6). Parker and many others did point out that it was never a secret that shop owners slept above the shops, and that this fact had been mentioned at prior township meetings. The township objected to the practice, notifying the festival two weeks prior to opening that they were in violation. The problem not only disrupted the festival, but it also fostered resentment in the crafters. “Parker says that living in the crafters’ shops is a way of life for the festival vendors. ‘I am not going to ask the crafters not to stay in their buildings. It’s completely unfair to ask these people to change their way of life in one fell swoop. It would make more sense to start planning for next year this October after the festival is over. . . . People will not move off site. This is a community of people and they are feeling threatened’” (Community Herald 6). Whether or not the township ostensibly held the interests of the crafters at heart is at question. If the safety were so important why would the township wait nearly twenty years before calling a halt to the practice?

Since this altercation, the MRF has gone a long way in working with the township. The site coordinator now attends all the township meetings and has complied with many of the changes residents have demanded. The new relationship has gone very well. Not all festivals, however, are as successful at renegotiating their place within the local community. Many times the local view held the Renaissance festival as a grouping of people who potentially threaten the given order. The bigger the MRF, or any other festival, gets the larger the threat of invasion for the outer community. Much of the threat derives from identity perceptions of the actors and other people working for the festival. In what, to me, is an unfair placement of blame, the outer, local group sees the festival as

employing certain “types of people”—people who appear, to them, to live outside the bounds of normal society. As such, the festival may also be seen as attracting this same segment of society as its audience. But what the conflict boils down to is a misperception and interpretation of identity.

History, Myth, and Identity

As seen in the previous chapters, the people who work for or participate in Renaissance festivals come from a wide variety of social categories. The identity-play allows them to validate or subvert these identities as they choose. The fantastic history and the myth that fuels it merely aids in this process. Because the Renaissance festival, especially the MRF, utilizes archetypes in the creation of the historical environment, it has the potential to include more heritage than a stricter performance of Elizabethan England might permit. The MRF, in particular, readily brings forward more possibilities for accessing different cultural identities than does the Scarborough Faire or, to an extent, the TRF. While using Tudor history as a platform, the MRF offers other possible connections to the history. The weekend themes proffer other archetypes for the audience to access. Personal connections can also be forged through this material without necessarily relying on race or gender or other standard categorizations. Aiding in this is the MRF’s blind casting policy, which ignores race and gender. As Land made clear to me, the MRF is far more concerned about the actor’s abilities to readily convey character and story while interacting with spectators and other actors.

The casting practice and the recruitment efforts of the International Institute of Detroit allow the MRF to have a higher level of cultural diversity in their more visible cast members, particularly the royal court. While watching the procession of the court onto the jousting field prior to the first tournament, I noticed an unusual sight—an African-American cast

member. I knew that I needed to speak with this woman, both in and out of character. Finding her name, Maria Christian, and where she would be later in the day, I eventually located her at the crossroads near the coffee house. In an extended conversation, she told me that she felt that there was a cultural hole in the historical narrative at the MRF and that it was her responsibility to fill it in for the audience. Though Christian has created a fictional character, the Princess Isaade M'Oboku of Yoruba, she has done so using research to embody a history for an audience that might not know or understand the role of Africa and its culture in that of the European Renaissance. Christian chooses to embrace group identity through the creation of this character focusing on the history rather than connecting with the mythic presentation. Yet, without the mythic flexibility of the MRF, she would find it difficult to insert her connection with the history into the narrative.

Another African-American present at the MRF made a no less political statement in choosing to ignore group identity while there. Again, while waiting for the joust to begin, from my vantage point in the royal pavilion, I noticed an African American man and his son dressed in character. Recognizing opportunity, I pelted down the stairs to find them in the crowd. Upon finding them, Paul Cooper and his son readily spoke with me. Both of them were dressed simply, but well. Cooper and his son both wore white large sleeved shirts and fitted leggings. Cooper carried a beautiful long bow but no arrows, while his son added a dark green jerkin and a long wooden sword to his ensemble. None of the materials used in their costumes seemed to resemble any of the items I had seen in the shops; they had apparently made them themselves or had purchased them elsewhere. I asked Cooper, rather directly, if he felt that the history presented at the MRF felt exclusionary to him as an African-American. Cooper looked somewhat surprised at first, as if the question had never

occurred to him. After a moment of thought, he replied, “No, I don’t feel that the history here is political at all. I read Ivanhoe and books like that when I was a kid; I always loved them” (Cooper Interview). He went on to explain that he felt connected to the spirit of the history and its events rather than the people. Cooper enjoyed dressing up and attending the MRF because “[i]t gives me a sense of adventure currently lacking today” (Cooper Interview). I asked him to explain what he meant by adventure. He elaborated by describing adventure as “the sense of potential; that something more is possible, waiting for discovery” (Cooper Interview). Cooper chose to participate in the expression of the mythic symbolism of the history rather than in the actual history being presented. Such a choice is no less political than Christian’s. Cooper participates in the myth and co-opts it for his own expression, which, to him, does not exclude his group or individual identity.

The MRF possesses the capability to embrace a variety of cultural identities within the narrative being presented, and Christian and Cooper embody two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. Christian’s character choice and reasons for that choice best express the first way in which to view cultural identity.

> The first position [does so] in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self,” . . . which people with a shared history or ancestry hold in common . . . our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as “one people,” with stable unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning . . . (Jussim 223)

At the MRF, the history presented can, in fact, become multiple histories overlapping with one another, which better exemplifies how history happens—as a complex and wonderfully messy process. While Christian

chooses to connect with her shared culture, there is room for others to connect with theirs.

After the wedding I witnessed, and prior to the joust, I continued along the remainder of Tree Top Lane, colloquially referred to as the MRF's back forty. I came across a medium-sized group of people who were in costume. Resplendent in chain mail, leather, and helmets that covered their faces, giving the impression of looking something like S and M fetish masks, they looked like burly bikers playing at being knights. I initially passed by, but something about them made me turn around. I asked to take their picture, and the two men in the group posed for me. Both were very generous and jovial. They seemed so at ease, almost professional about it, that I had to ask a few questions. They were father and son. The son, whose first name was somewhat mumbled into my tape recorder, had just been married. I asked if they had dressed up for the wedding in character. "Yes," he replied, "in costume." Their surname was unmistakable: Carpenter. It happened to be blazoned across the father's huge steel shield along with a coat of arms. I asked them why they dressed up and came to the MRF. The elder Carpenter explained that they had been coming to the MRF for the past six years and enjoyed reconnecting with their family's past. The MRF gave them a place in which to do it. He explained that he and his son also liked the sense of romance here. I asked them, "Would you still do it, without the romantic version of history, even knowing about the realities of the past like hunger, cold, disease?" With no hesitation, the son replied "In a second" and his father echoed the same sentiment (Carpenter Interview). The Carpenters, like Christian, make personal connections with an actual historical past. While they also affiliate themselves with the romantic archetypes of the Renaissance, their primary reliance in creating their identities is rooted in the history. For

Christian, it is a cultural legacy, whereas, for the Carpenters, it is a personal family history.

The MRF has room for both the cultural and the personal in history regardless of background, but others who do not wish to do either can still make a connection through an appropriation of the myths or ideas of the Renaissance rather than the history. With this type of connection, cultural identity plays a role but in a less conventional sense. Connections between cultural identity and the history are forged through identifying with change. In the first way of looking at cultural identity, history solidifies a shared experience, but there is another way of examining the formation and expression of cultural identity—change.

> [T]here are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute "what we really are" or rather—since history has intervened—"what we have become." . . .Cultural identity in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being". . . . It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Jussim 225)

The way in which we conceive of cultural identity can be changed and is malleable in this second definition. Cooper related to the history in a more abstract, though no less personal or political, way. He took the symbolic aspects of the Renaissance, in some ways mythic, and co-opted them as a part of his own identity. In doing so, he attached them to his own concept of cultural identity, even though he may not have consciously done so. In any case, his choice becomes no less empowering than was Christian's.

With a broad usage of myth, most people can understand the context of play without serious conflict, while still remaining free to explore the basis of these myths and the history. The interactive nature of

the performance in conjunction with a reliance on myth and mythic symbol to represent history opens up boundary readings of community within the Renaissance festival. This encourages people who may not have any connection to the history in any way access to the community being created within the performance and still allow them to participate in identity play.

> [T]he 'commonality' which is found in community need not be a uniformity. It does not clone behaviour or ideas. It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members. The triumph of community is to so contain thus variety that its inherent discordance does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries (Cohen 20).

The Renaissance festival manages to create a microcosm of community in this way. The performance is about ways of behaving and how these manifest in the identities chosen by the spectators who wish to participate. Some people will choose not to read the symbols set out by the performance in a historical fashion. The readings are no less valid in a festival that relies so much upon myth. In "mis"-reading the symbols, the people can insert themselves into one community while asserting and confirming membership within another.

For several years while I served on the production staff, people who role-played within the Star Trek universe would come in full costume. Individuals included Federation officers and a few Klingons who would pretend that the village happened to be another planet, or sometimes an alternate universe. Their video recorders became tri-corders, and they would approach us as aliens. Even so, *everyone* agrees that the MRF represents a village community that has some placement within a larger historical and possibly fictional world. Within that space all of these

things are possible, and mostly accepted. As such, the level of tolerance certainly rises to an ideal not present in our own communities. Even this behavior offers up an ideal performed community where expression can be accepted.[4]

> While for many people, the creation of identities may simply remain play, for others there is the opportunity to air identities that may come to be socially significant. So and so outlines how though people carry "a number of potential identities, only a few of which become socially significant, making a difference in everyday life" (Eriksen 61).

These identities are connected to our pasts and our experiences but are not always given the opportunity for expression. Without expression or experimentation, these potentially positive and empowering aspects of the personality may not be explored. The MRF grants people an environment for an exploration of these identities in a social circumstance. In doing so, new communities can form without necessarily relying on familiarity or traditional social categorization.

Conclusion

The MRF, more so than the other festivals in this study, creates a performance rich in possibilities for the incorporation of multiple communities and group identities. It does so through a larger incorporation of fantasy into the history being presented. If Renaissance festivals rigidly only held to the presentation of historically accurate material, creating such a performance would be more difficult. Specific groups would be included and others excluded in order to product a suitably common reading. Because the material utilized by the festivals is not always founded in history but also includes elements of fantasy and of other aspects of different histories, they avoid the problem. The MRF, especially

by not explicating a specific history, opens up the interpretation to other readings. The mythological ancestry becomes less specific and prescribed, leaving more on the individual person and how they choose to interpret this history. As a result, more personal connections are drawn, but these personal connections also allow for new communities of people to form. The stress is upon mythic archetypes rather than specific mythologies. As many anthropologists have noted, the leit motifs for myth tend to be shared across cultural boundaries, differing only in manifestation rather than the actual raw content.

Land believes that the move back to a stricter historical base is necessary for the MRF, but still emphasizes that the purpose of the festival is to entertain and make money. Such a move opens an opportunity for exchange with the community, especially through school visits to the site. As a new offering, she intends to include a historical tour of the festival where people would sign up and, as a group, visit particular places on the site in order to work with or speak to historical persons. While this is a trend worth considering, the MRF would still maintain a lack of a specific date and fictitious persons on the court and in the village in order to avoid being constrained by specifics. Land reconciles the need for a more historical base and the flexibility of fiction by limiting the history presented to the sixteenth century in general. They do feel that such a stance offers the opportunity for a wider number of people to find what they need so that they may insert themselves into any play.

While the usage of living history techniques can enhance the Renaissance festival experience, it also carries the potential to make the festival nothing more than yet another heritage site. History at the MRF is a starting point, a place to begin to view possibilities. The usage of myth helps to incorporate a large range of individuals into a narrative that, under the circumstances of a traditional heritage site, would not otherwise

include them. Patterson believed in a performance venue that could incorporate a large number of people into an experience of another culture. Her goal was to increase public understanding through a performance that created a community. Incorporation of the audience into this community was vital to historical and cultural understanding. But the festivals have largely moved away from this more educational purpose and into one largely meant to entertain. A balance between the two is not only necessary, but can serve to create a beneficial performance for everyone. A few festivals are in the process of adding a wider offering of cultural history, while others are experimenting with the potential to incorporate more social consciousness. The MRF has the potential to do both through a responsible use of history that actively courts and incorporates myth. Without both, the flexibility of building participatory communities and playing with individual identity becomes too difficult or lost entirely. The focus of the Renaissance festival should not be upon what people were or would have been in the past, but what they could be in relation to their current present.

The three Renaissance festivals represent a small sampling of the Renaissance festivals in operation within the United States. While they all share basic performance structure, I have shown that their ways of presenting community and encouraging identity play can be quite different. Interpersonal interactive performance, commerce, and the use of both history and myth remain ingredients for all three, but size, focus of performance, and audience can act as factors governing the prevalence of one ingredient over another. This does not detract from the popularity of the Renaissance festival nor does it impinge upon the expectations of the spectators. Rather, the three use what is necessary to create community and identity for their particular circumstances. Renaissance festivals illustrate how the performance itself can be the means for community; one

in which conventional notions of community and identity can be subverted and made to be more diverse and inclusive. There is the potential for Renaissance festivals to create further avenues for the exploration and questioning of community and identity, especially as they relate to history, should directors, actors, and audience members choose to do so.

Endnotes

[1] No one I spoke to seems to know or remember his name.

[2] The name was a result of a large open competition initiated after the MRF moved to the Dixie Highway site. Festival and community members were asked for name suggestions. Hollygrove is derived from Holly and Groveland Townships, where the MRF is located.

[3] Due to the large number of festivals under Mid-America Festivals, of which the MRF is a part, the group employs a single entertainment director who oversees all the festivals. Assistant entertainment directors provide the support and knowledge of the local festivals and act in the capacity of the entertainment director in his absence.

[4] That said there are still some forms of behavior that are tacitly understood and unacceptable. These would include drunkeness, sexual assault or any form of malicious harassment. Certain social values based in individual respect are still in play.

Afterword

You Don't Have to Go Home, But You Can't Stay Here

Once, at the end of a particularly hot August day, perhaps a week or so before the gentlemen walked away from their burning car, I stood at the gates of the MRF. We were finishing the closing ceremony, and all I could think of was getting out of the corset and into a cool shower. The king addressed the crowd finishing the speech with the same words all monarchs of Hollygrove have used since the first MRF: "Go forth in peace, go with Our love, and live the dream!" While others in the crowd cheered, a woman standing near me began to cry. She and her companion had dressed up in costume, and as she sobbed, I could not help but edge closer to understand what the matter was. Through ragged breaths, I came to realize that she did not want to go home, but wanted to stay here, live here; she did not want it to end. I recall thinking, at the time, that she must have been out of her mind. The clothing was uncomfortable, everything was covered with dust, and the temperature refused to lower even though the sun was on its way down. Looking back at that moment, I have come to understand through my research why some people feel such a deep attachment for the world that they find at the Renaissance festival. The festival contains both the self and the community they wish they had.

"Live the Dream" is a phrase that carries resonance for people who have attended the MRF, but I believe it is applicable to all Renaissance festivals. At the end of the performance, this line has enjoined the audience member to live out in the external world the kaleidoscopic community they experienced in the performance of the MRF. From a more sentimental perspective, living the dream of a community at festival is certainly something that people want to carry with them into the wider

world, whether they are actors or audience members. Regardless of how the community within the Renaissance festival is constructed, a potential for bonding with others exists that can exert a stronger pull than the communities of the everyday.

What audience members experience is very much an idealized community free of the negative aspects. “People create a symbolic world which is a kind of fantastic reconstruction of empirical society: the dialectical contrast between the two is resolved by a reassertion of the inevitability and desireability of the first through recognition of the fantasy and impossibility of the second” (Cohen 63). The Renaissance festival offers a sense of perpetual excitement and stimuli where part of the romance derives from the community, affability, and courtesy associated with the period. In the end, sustaining the excitement and variety within the reality of the Renaissance festival would be impossible; it is inevitable that more and more aspects of the present would filter into the performance. As seen in the previous chapters, this has already happened to greater and lesser extents at various festivals. At the close of the day, the spectator must still return to her home at the end of the performance, ending the fantasy of living within the festival even though there remains a yearning for the opportunity to present an identity as the person wishes to be seen or wishes she actually were. Such desire, however, is only ever partially satisfied. Mundane reality cannot support the identity that people may wish to express. In fact, the identities taken on safely at the Renaissance festival may not be supportable anywhere but within the *temenos* built by the performance. At the festival, a woman may choose to be a sassy wench. Such a choice is an historical one, but the social stigma historically associated with such women is absent. This would not be the case within reality. If a woman were to carry over such an identity into the everyday world, there would be repercussions, and many of them would

be in keeping with history. She might be raped, beaten, or, if she is lucky, simply treated with derision and shunned. The Renaissance festival, however, creates a safe and accepting community for a person to play out identities such as a wench. This is one of many possible reasons that people are willing to abandon a burning car, without ever looking back.

I must admit, however, that I and my fellow actors often looked askance at those people who never wanted to go home. We usually said of those people, whether they were audience members or actors, that they "were living the dream a little too hard." There seems to be something which can be viewed as slightly bizarre about a person who cannot or is unwilling to participate in the world that exists outside the bounds of the performance. What they fail to see at the Renaissance festival is that it is not a perfect place. It functions as an ideal because people *want* it to be ideal. The power of this environment stems from its ability to suppress non-ideal aspects of history, community, and identity while simultaneously satisfying the ideal desires of the audience. The Renaissance festival also satisfies these ideals because it exists as a commercial venture, and that is what commercial ventures strive to do—satisfy the customers by giving them what they want.

More often than not, the spectators' views of the material being presented do not hinge on actual history but desire for a particular history. This history does not depend upon actual events, but instead it relies upon the interpretation of the individual who has culled an understanding of that past from any number of sources. Truth and fiction conjoin in ways that are no longer prescribed. In this way, notions of identity and community pull free of the historical and social restraints which are always already in place. This tendency could be harnessed to create a more socially conscious flexibility to the venue and to participation within the festival.

The exploration of Renaissance festivals within this work really only scratches the surface of what they do with performance and brings forward even more questions that cannot be adequately answered within this particular study. One of the largest questions concerns the way in which people participate in the performances and the level to which they do so. At every Renaissance festival some spectators choose to participate and some do not, but at a specific point they make an active choice. Some people come to the festival in full costume, ready to play out a character within the village. Others may be pulled in more gradually during the course of the day. Still others, like the woman I noticed, do not wish to leave. Finding what might generally instigate the choice and the level to which a person chooses to participate could be harnessed to give directors and actors a better idea of how to structure the performance and give the spectator what she needs or wants.

To this end, I think that tinkering with the performance structure and purpose of the Renaissance festival is valuable to only a very limited extent. Some festival directors would like to see the festivals turn toward a more traditional living history. Doing so would severely reduce the abilities of the Renaissance festival to be inclusive and as a result would inhibit the sense of community and play of identity. Instead, directors should think of ways to explore social issues within a framework of constructive play. This study has shown the potential for Renaissance festivals to build communities and identities that foster the ability to explore and question social issues. I set out to show that community can be built through a performance in a number of ways when no pre-existing community is present. Further exploration would be needed specific performances and characters to see how they influence play within the audience. Ultimately, I believe that Renaissance festivals should question and explore further the notions of community and identity. They should do

so by continuing to use history, expanding upon the histories that are included at most Renaissance festivals. In the process they should not forget their very successful roots in fantasy, myth, and legend.

From the very early Renaissance festivals, the purpose of the performance was to create an open exchange between the actors and the audience members; one not dictated by script or the traditional fourth wall. The performances fostered a more personal interaction between the actors and the audience, and hopefully among the audience members themselves. Each person, spectator and actor, aids in the creation of the community, and the fact that the performance parodies itself make the environment more relaxed and easier for the spectator to access. The Renaissance festival depends upon this interchange in order to create an engaging and compelling performance environment. The play of ideas, such as community and identity, ultimately relies upon the people involved in the performance.

At present, theatre is facing difficulties in finding a direction and regaining viewers. While Broadway has found an audience based primarily in tourism, regional theatres scramble to hang on to their waning audiences. Such a situation makes it vital for theatres to attempt to connect with their potential audiences and diversify their offerings. Renaissance festivals can illustrate one type of performance that not only maintains its audience base, but also possesses the ability to address a number of individual and community needs within the spectators. The Renaissance festival has the power to pull people into the performance and communicate with and through them, and because of this people can use it as a tool to explore community, identity, and their personal agency in producing them.

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